

THE MAN FROM **U.N.C.L.E.**

MAGAZINE

SEPT. 50c FOC

NAPOLEON SOLO • ILLYA KURYAKIN



No man knew them! All men feared them!
Only our master spy hunters stood between
THRUSH and their control of a free world.

THE BRAINWASH AFFAIR

A New Complete U.N.C.L.E. Novel by ROBERT HART DAVIS

MURDER IN SAIGON

A War Time Spy Novelet by TOM H. MORIARTY

THE BRAINWASH AFFAIR

Deadly, hidden, THRUSH'S master plot could topple the nations of the free world. And somewhere, Napoleon and Illya must track it down, destroy it—before it was too late!

THE NEW COMPLETE "U.N.C.L.E." NOVEL

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

PART ONE—INCIDENT OF THE FRIGHTENED MAN

NAPOLEON SOLO swung down from the Orient Express, strolled across the station concourse to the street exit, and exposed himself to incredible perils by entering a Parisian taxi.

"Orly Airport," Solo said and sank back in the cab as it hacked and barked its way through the traffic.

Returning alone to Manhattan from a Middle East assignment, he was tired and still shaken from a close brush with death.

Trying to escape disturbing thoughts, he watched early evening strollers, diners at street cafes, the maniacal charges of other cabs. It wasn't that easy. He thought about his apartment, the luxuries he was infrequently at home to enjoy, but mostly his mind darted back to his fellow agent who'd been killed three days ago in the street at Istanbul.

Death had struck only inches from him; it could have as easily been he and not his partner. Battered by this sudden impact of his own expendability, he wondered how long before death closed in those few inches?

He glimpsed in a window the reflected faint tightening about his lips. Fatigue, that was all. A plan trip west across the Atlantic, a hot-cold shower, a Scotch on the rocks, twelve hours unbroken sack time and he'd recover.

In the babbling confusion at Orly Airport, his sense of isolation increased. Then abruptly he caught sight of a familiar lace and he

shoved through a knot of chattering tourists, smiling warmly and expectantly.

"Lester!" Solo called. "Lester Caillou!"

Hurrying toward a door marked *Sortie*, Caillou broke stride. His shoulders hunched as if against a blow. He glanced tensely over his shoulder.

Solo paused a few feet from Caillou. People brushed past them on both sides. When Caillou turned, Solo saw panic graying the slender man's dark face. Solo had seen the same look in eyes of trapped animals.

Caillou's gaze raked across Solo, paused the fraction of a second that betrayed that Caillou had recognized him. Solo was alerted by training and experience to instant reactions to facial expressions, even to lack of expression.

Caillou winced and jerked his head around. His knuckles whitened on his attaché case. He hurried toward the exit.

They were old friends. Solo angled across the distance between them, intercepting Caillou at the glass doors. In-drafts struck them as the doors parted.

"*Pardon, Monsieur*, what hour is it?" Solo spoke in French, extending his wrist watch, a Swiss calendar-clock which Caillou had presented, as identical gifts of gratitude, to him and to Illya Kuryakin.

An affair of Arabian oil and reconstruction money from Caillou's Paris-based bank, a misunderstanding, got Caillou before a Turk firing squad. Solo and Kuryakin had pulled him out of it. Swearing eternal allegiance, Caillou wanted them to remember him as warmly and had believed the thousand dollar watches would keep him in their memories.

"No. No." Caillou shook his head now, refusing even to glance toward the golden watch on Solo's wrist.

Caillou's stricken gaze leaped past Solo, scurrying across faces and forms as if he found this brilliantly illumined lobby a pit of unspeakable terrors.

Solo had seen frightened men before, but never one who wore his terror as openly as did Caillou. He was pushed beyond hiding it.

"Lester, don't you remember me?" Solo persisted, because this didn't make sense.

An ordinary man might be frightened, hurrying toward the haven of a plane, but Caillou was not ordinary. Solo remembered Caillou had faced Turk marksmen without flinching, and two hours later drank *raki* with him and Illya, laughing, glowing with the exultation of being alive.

"No. No. There is some mistake. If you please." Caillou shook his head again. Pallor underscored the rigidity of his high cheekbones.

Before Solo could speak or lose the warmth of his smiling and the far-out memories of that drinking session, Caillou pushed around him and thrust through the exit doors.

Involuntarily, Solo followed him through the electronically operated doorway.

In the chilled wind off the field, Solo stared after Caillou.

On the concrete runway, Caillou paused for one final surreptitious glance over his shoulder, then ran toward a waiting charter plane.

Solo exhaled heavily, considering wryly the expendability of life-long gratitudes, then discarding the thought. He knew he'd just witnessed a desperate man being towed into a vortex of agony beyond his depth.

Sighing, Solo turned back, then paused, hardly knowing why he did.

Something caught his eye. From the underbelly of a plane near the one toward which Caillou ran in the darkness, a freight elevator lowered, containing only a small single-seat car.

The car was bright red, smaller than any compact Solo had seen before. Oddly formed, it was round in front, tapered in the rear.

Solo saw no driver until the elevator touched the concrete. At this moment the car's engine flared to life.

Solo then saw a man crouched behind the wheel. Surprisingly brilliant headlamps burst yellowly to life. The little car roared off the lift, racing toward Lester Caillou.

Solo yelled involuntarily.

Instinctively his hand thrust under his jacket, drawing the U.N. C.I.E.

.38 caliber Special. He went running forward, seeing he was too far away to aid Caillou.

Caillou stopped running and turned in the glare of the head lights, his face wild with horror.

He was illumined there a moment as if pinned against an insurmountable wall of night.

Hood-mounted guns fired suddenly. Screaming, Caillou threw himself face down on the concrete, as if trying to dig himself a fox hole.

Solo ran out on the concrete. He fired twice as the small deadly car bore down on Caillou. Caillou was like a frantic insect scrambling on hands and knees toward the plane ladder.

Solo's bullets slapped across the gleaming metal, inches from the driver's head. He swerved a moment; then a plastic bubble bloomed, covering him effectively.

But in that brief instant, Caillou was able to squeeze his way in behind the metal ladder. He hugged himself against it.

Seeing he could not hope to penetrate the plastic cowl covering the driver, Solo fired toward its oversized tires, seeing for the first time that it moved on a tricycle set.

The car roared past the ladder, going under the spreading wings of the 727.

Solo ran forward, firing. As the car raced, a pole of light-weight metal sprang upward from the plastic cowling. It gleamed a moment like a wavering antenna in the night, then separated, spinning as its blades locked into place.

Police cars screamed in pursuit along the runway. But long before they reached the small red machine, its helicopter-type rotary blades lifted it upward in darkness and it swung away into the night sky at incredible speed.

Stunned, Solo stopped running, stood with his gun at his side, watching the small apparition dissolve into the haze above the emblazoned runway.

Remembering Caillou, Solo swung around toward the banker and his private jet.

Turning, Solo reacted to a sharp twinge in his side, pain akin to muscular spasms—or a knife biting at him:

It was a knife.

Solo cut-short his turning. A knife blade making itself felt through top coat, jacket and shirt could inflict irreparable damage if one swung around into it.

"Ah, this is wise."

"The wish to stay alive makes wise men of us all," Solo quoted.

He stared into the face of a man hewn from Moorish stone. Flat eyes shallowly reflected light, the way a dog's might. Several inches taller than Solo, broader, in London-tailored fabric tortured into the latest Mod fashion, his goatee was trimmed to a black point and his hair fitted like a cap close upon his scalp.

Solo glanced down at the razor-honed blade nibbling at his side. The big man held it in oddly bulky kid-skin gloves.

Solo said, "To what do I owe the pleasure of this encounter?"

"We wish to talk quietly with you, Monsieur," the Moor said in French.

"*Moi non parle Francais*," Solo said. He shifted his gaze to the Arab woman close against his other side.

About her sharp-featured face there was an extreme of loveliness and a worldly arrogance, as if she were not only a girl that knew the score, but had invented the game. Her beauty was eye-arresting, but its packaging was tarnished by her long-brushes with sin.

"He says he does not speak French," she told the knife-wielding Moor in disgust

"He'd better learn, if he means to keep butting in like this," the Moor said in English.

He prodded the knife less than a sixteenth of an inch, yet Solo had to bite his lip to suppress an agonized yell.

"Come," the Moor said. "We will talk in my office."

They marched him toward the terminal building, walking close beside him.

Solo scowled. Unless these two were connected with Caillou's attacker, their accosting him didn't make pretty good sense.

The Moor jerked his head to ward an alleyway.

"My office," he said with a cold grin.

Solo shrugged. "Where else?"

The Arab woman led the way into the darkness. They marched Solo to a partitioned maintenance area.

Solo put his back to a wall. He said, "Well, what shall we talk about? Lovely weather, isn't it?"

The Moor stared at him unblinkingly. In a deft movement he transferred the switch-blade to the woman.

"I don't have a lot to say, ma chere ami." The Moor worked the bulky gloves off his fingers. "But what I do tell you, you will recall for a long time."

He smiled ruefully. He shook the gloves, lowering them in one hand toward his side.

Watching the big man closely, Solo reacted too slowly.

The Moor brought the gloves up, backhanded. They caught Solo in the temple.

Solo's legs melted to oleo. Before the Moor struck him in the other temple, Solo was already crumbling to his knees on the ground.

He felt the battering of those lead-lined gloves. His last conscious thought was that he understood why the Moor had removed them. If he'd hit him with those gloves on, he might have bruised his hands, or even fractured a metacarpus bone.

TWO

SOLO SAGGED into the window seat of the Trans-World jet, cruising at thirty-five thousand feet above the Atlantic.

He felt uncomfortably warm in the pressurized cabin.

A compassionate stewardess leaned toward him.

She was built cafeteria style: you wanted to help yourself. Even from the depths of his pain, Solo saw she'd be habit forming.

She winced at his facial abrasions and contusions. She said, "You poor man. You must be in total pain."

Solo attempted to smile.

"No. My left eyeball hurts hardly at all."

She extended an international copy of the *New York Times*. "Do you feel like reading?"

Solo did not answer.

His gaze froze on the headline:

WORLD BANK DEVALUES DOLLAR AND POUND IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE.

He stared at the newspaper. What he had witnessed tonight tied in with that headline, even if he didn't know how.

He saw Lester Caillou, a World Bank director, running frightened toward a plane, attacked from the darkness.

Many hours later, Solo carried that disturbing mental image as he left a taxi at Third Avenue and walked in the east Forties toward the United Nations Complex.

He walked down a flight of steps, entered Del Floria's Cleaning and Tailoring shop, in the basement of an inconspicuous whitestone building.

The tailor gave him a glance, but registered no reaction to Solo's battered face. It had been weeks since Solo had entered the place, but to Del Floria it might have been last night.

At the rear of the shop, Solo stepped between curtains into a dressing booth. He pressed a wall button.

There was a pause of three breaths, but in this time much happened in the complex sensory nerves of the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement beyond an unmarked door in the wall.

Unseen eyes scanned him; complex memory tapes in computers whirled, finding him acceptable; inner mechanisms flicked into action and he was admitted into the chrome and steel interior of the home base of the world's most far-flung crime-fighting organization.

Despite its unpretentious appearance, the whitestone building housed cells of bustling activity— from its roof where a huge, innocent-appearing sign concealed antennae and sending apparatus to a maze of water-ways connecting it with the East River and the furthest cranny of the earth, to its main offices where everything and every one worked ceaselessly to contain, control, eradicate crime on an international scale.

The receptionist pinned an identification tag to Solo's lapel. She smelled of violets, but her curves pressured against the primness of her uniform, and her smile promised that she played to win. She smiled at his bruises.

"Someday you're going to learn to take no for an answer, Mr. Solo."

His grin matched hers. "That'll be the day."

Illya Kuryakin fell into step beside him inside the brightly lit corridors. A persistent muffled hum emanating even from the walls showed that all systems throbbed steadily from the foundation itself and out across the universe, wherever man carried evil.

Illya was slenderly made, but his leanness was deceptive. Solo had been trained to kill by every known method devised in the mind of man. Yet he was continually thankful that Illya was on his side.

Illya's smile was hesitant, crooked. His eyes were blue, and a lock of pale blond hair toppled over his forehead, and it grew shabbily on his collar. He didn't look like what he was, a Russian-born agent, incredibly trained in every aspect of global espionage.

Illya spoke casually. "Sorry to hear about Mace's death. Hope it was quick."

"And from the back," Solo said in remembered rage.

Illya ignored the contusions swelling Solo's cheeks, discoloring his eyes. "What sort of trip home?"

Solo shook his head, spoke casually. "The in-flight movie was lousy. All about spies and people getting sluggish. Completely unbelievable."

ALEXANDER WAVERLY peered at Illya and Solo across his desk in the Command Room. Cited by almost every nation for bravery and distinguished service, Waverly might well have been past the age of enforced retirement, but if he were, it was a fact that not even U.N.C.L.E.'s computer dared bring before him.

Heavy set, his face a map of old campaigns, victories, losses and pain, Waverly was one of five men at the top of the United Command. These executives came from five different nations, two from behind the iron curtain.

Now he was saying, "We're convinced THRUSH is behind this scheme to control the World Bank. If they are allowed to continue even for a week, they could throw the world into financial chaos."

"How would they hope to control the world through the World Bank?" Illya said.

"I'll tell you what I've learned in recent briefings," Waverly said. "I was briefed by three of the most influential figures in international finance. They were in panic. It's possible, even easy, with the world divided as it is, to cause depression, ruin, even to the three or four greatest powers, by manipulating the value of their currency—forcing down the value of say the pound, the dollar, the franc, the ruble, while force-lifting the value of some other currency to please those behind the conspiracy."

"Why hasn't it been done before?" Solo asked.

"It has," Waverly said. "Currency of countries has been devalued, a country has been forced to back its paper currency with gold reserves beyond its means—but never on such a vast, cruel and inhuman scale as this present conspiracy can be."

"Why would they want to do it?" Illya said.

"In the minds of international renegades who care only to rule the world, the economy of great powers can be destroyed without a qualm. What would THRUSH care what happened to the dollar? We believe THRUSH is behind this. Our computers have selected THRUSH as the only alliance so callously heartless as to spread world-wide ruin, depression. THRUSH could then hope to take over international banking and thus control all nations."

Solo found himself remembering the stark fear in Lester Caillou's face.

"How could it happen?"

"There are many ways that one man, or several key men in the World Bank could make sudden and drastic changes in monetary policies that would create international fiscal crises.

"First, by buying, demanding gold in payment, collecting all gold, until one nation, or one group controls gold, an imbalance of fearful proportions would be created.

"Next, causing business and export-importers to lose faith in any country's currency, so they'd refuse to accept anything except gold as a medium of exchange, is another way to create panic.

"If, in panic, several countries refused to accept a country's currency in exchange for materials or services, disaster for the country affected, follows.

"Another way would be to flood a country with counterfeit money, causing panic among banks and people.

"This devaluation of the money of the great nations of the free world looks like THRUSH's first calculated step toward the control of world finances.

"One of its biggest threats is to peaceful trade between East and West. It's taken a long time to stabilize it. Commerce between West and East countries has made a one hundred percent increase in the last seven years. This will be wiped out by THRUSH manipulation of the dollar."

Waverly gazed at his operatives. "In THRUSH's hands, this is money gone berserk, leading to panic, mistrust between nations, especially the Iron Curtain and the free world."

Illya shook his head. "How could THRUSH control the World Bank directors?"

"Very likely they couldn't," Waverly said. "In order to cause disaster, they'd need to control no more than two or three, perhaps only one. They count on shock and reaction to help after the value of free world currency is forced down."

Illya persisted. "How could they control even one director who must be known down to his smallest vice by the World Bank and by his own

people?"

"We have that answer, too," Waverly said. "THRUSH owns the Ultimate Computer, as you men well know. All known facts about World Bank directors are programmed into their ultimate computer. From these known facts, the Computer gives them the unknown facts, the weaknesses, strengths, perhaps even the most carefully guarded secrets in the pasts of these men. THRUSH would then find the weakest link and—" Waverly spread his hands, letting them complete the thought in their own minds.

After some moments Waverly said, "Our task is clear. Simple. We must uncover the plot and expose it. One factor THRUSH cannot overcome in an operation like this is publicity. Once their victim of blackmail pressure extortion is located, once that black secret is exposed, this particular gimmick will no longer work for them."

Illya spoke slowly. "But we must have proof, eh? To air suspicions, without proof, would only increase the panic—"

"Right. And play THRUSH's game for them," Waverly agreed. "I see I've chosen the right two men for this vital mission."

Solo spoke without much hope., "Our computers weren't able to supply the name of the man or men that THRUSH has gotten under its control?"

Waverly smiled sourly. "Our computer is not the Ultimate Computer, Napoleon. Using it against THRUSH's ultimate machine is a sad battle of unequals."

"We know nothing more than what you've told us, then?" Napoleon Solo asked.

"We know only that THRUSH, through its Ultimate Computer, can learn men's weaknesses, can control them, and through this man or men, can control and wreck the world financially."

"Their man might be anyone in the World Bank," Illya Kuryakin said.

Waverly nodded. "And he will defy exposure, because he will have even more to lose, from his own view, than THRUSH. Exposure will mean disgrace and death to him. This is how THRUSH was able to get him under control in the first place."

"Where do we start?" Illya asked.

Solo yawned helplessly. "I could start with a shower and a beauty-rest."

Waverly said, "Hope you liked Paris, Napoleon."

"It wasn't dull." Solo touched gingerly at his face.

"We're sending you back there on the next jet."

"I wasn't that enthused about it—"

"Directors of the World Bank are meeting in Paris with the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury and De Gaulle's finance men. This seems an ideal moment to test THRUSH's strength and power."

"Should be easy, Illya," Solo said in a low ironic tone. "All THRUSH has is the Ultimate Computer—and after all, we have each other."

"Precisely my view," said Alexander Waverly.

THREE

THE AIRFRANCE jet screamed homing in on the black fabric of its runway laced across the Orly airfield. The lights of Paris shone distantly an hour before dawn. Even at this hour the City of Light glowed, sparkling like thrown gems.

Solo and Kuryakin left Customs, crossed the lobby to pick up the Citroen which had been reserved in their names. The vivacious French girl at the rental desk handed over the keys and bade them in French to have a good time.

Two menacing forms materialized from the fading night shadows as Solo and Illya approached theft car.

Solo hesitated a few feet from the Citroen, touching Illya's arm warningly.

The Arab girl and the huge Moor lounged against the hood of the Citroen.

"So you came back," the Moor said to Solo in pity and contempt.

"Do you have the fright concession at this airport?" Solo asked.

"Only when we need it," the Moor said. "Only when men like you refuse to learn."

"Friends of yours, Napoleon?" Illya inquired.

Solo spoke from the side of his mouth. "Watch his gloves. Metal lined."

"Come quietly," the Moor said, standing erect. "No one need get hurt."

"Oh, I think it's time someone got hurt," Solo said urbanely.

Solo lunged suddenly toward the Moor.

"Look out, Albert!" the Arab woman screamed.

The Moor laughed, setting himself. "I'm always careful, Gizelle."

Coming in close to Albert, Solo feinted with his left. Laughing, the Moor swung upward.

Solo danced lightly beyond the reach of the wildly swinging arm. He clasped Albert's wrist as the big Moor drove forward.

Grabbing the arm in both hands, Solo moved with him, smashing the gloved fist into the fender of the nearest car.

Albert sobbed in agony. Solo did not even hesitate. He chopped Albert across the neck with the side of his hand. Albert toppled, his face striking the car fender. The sound was like a boulder pounding metal.

Gizelle watched for one horrified moment. She sprang at Illya, fighting a switchblade from her pocket.

"Don't forget you're a lady, Gizelle," Illya warned, "Or I'll have to."

Gizelle sprang the blade free, flicking it open. At this moment she walked into Illya's fingers, driven short and hard into her throat.

"You left me no alternative, ma'am," Illya apologized.

Gizelle retched, dropped her knife. She sank to the pavement on her knees, hands pressed to her throat, face livid.

Illya jerked his head toward the Citroen, opening the door as he did.

Solo however, tossed him the keys. "I want Albert to recall this evening for a long time," he said curtly.

Illya scowled. "It's not like you to let rage suspend reason, Solo."

"I've never been quite this angry."

"You're making a mistake, Solo. Let's get out of here."

Fatigue and outrage made Solo hoarse. "I think it would be a mistake to let them off so lightly."

Illya slid across the seat under the wheel. He inserted the key in to the ignition switch, watching Solo through the windshield.

Solo lifted the car hood. On the pavement the Arab Gizelle remained crouched, watching in anguish. Solo hefted the Moor, draped him across the fender, both his gloved hands extended over the engine block.

Solo thrust the lead-lined gloves over the spark-plugs, lowered the hood across Albert's back.

"Start the car," he ordered.

Illya turned the key. The car motor sprang to life. Albert screamed; the hood was thrown upward. Albert lunged away, falling across the walk. He trembled all over. People turned, staring.

Calmly Solo lowered the hood, secured it.

He got into the car beside Illya.

"Now let's go," he said.

Illya laughed. "Vengeance is a great thing with you, isn't it, Napoleon?"

Solo shrugged and laid his head on the seat rest. He stared at the ceiling of the compact. "My grandmother told me that if I always vented my rage on the objects of my rage, I wouldn't build up frustrations and end with a tic."

Illya reversed the car, turned it toward the Paris exit. "She must have been a great old lady. Wonder what she'd say we should do about a car that is following us?"

Solo sat up, checked through the rear window.

"Lose it," he advised.

"Your grandmother was a crunchy old girl, wasn't she?" Illya said, flooring the accelerator.

"She was all we could afford at the time," Solo replied. "And we wouldn't have been here without her."

The car behind them made no pretense it was not trailing the Citroen.

When Illya touched the brake at the highway entrance, the convertible slapped against the rear bumper.

Illya raced forward, turning in to the sparse truck traffic of early morning.

The convertible swung out behind them. Solo twisted on the bucket seat, watching it. He touched at the U.N.C.L.E. Special in its Berns-Martin shoulder holster.

"How many in the car?" Illya inquired, gripping the wheel with both hands.

"The top is up," Solo said. "Too dark to see. We know at least there's a maniac at the wheel."

"Got a bit of sticky news for you," Illya said after a moment. "Sixty seems to be our top speed."

The convertible pounced forward alongside them. Illya jerked the wheel, taking the Citroen to the edge of the road, slamming on brakes and then gunning it as the convertible whipped toward them.

"Couple of vegetable trucks," Solo said. "There's room for us between them. We won't make any time, but it's the safest spot I can think of at the moment."

"That convertible won't let us pass that rear truck." Illya protested.

"Perhaps not on the left," Solo agreed calmly.

Illya's blue eyes widened. "Pass on—the right?"

"My grandmother's watchword was resourcefulness, Illya."

"I wish she were driving."

"So do I, but we can't have everything."

There was the scream of metal as the convertible nudged at the Citroen's rear fender.

Illya swerved the car hard to the right, kept going. The Citroen struck the road shoulder, bouncing and chattering.

The trucker ahead, catching a glimpse of the compact in his off-mirror, struck his horn violently. His Gallic curses turned the dawn a savage blue.

Illya swung in ahead of the truck, missing its huge right front wheel by inches.

Both Illya and Solo grabbed leather, because at this same instant, the convertible whipped from the left into the narrow space between the two trucks.

Horns blared, brakes squealed. Only the swearing, weeping driver in the truck behind averted a collision by stomping on his brakes, fading behind them as if carried away on the wind.

Illya muttered something in a language that Solo didn't understand, and that perhaps Kuryakin didn't understand, either, words invented for this fearful moment.

The convertible bore in upon them, forcing them off the pavement.

"One small last trick remaining in my bag," Illya said half to himself.

He jerked hard right on the wheel and floored the gas pedal, whipping the Citroen to the inside of the lead truck, as he had done the first one.

They saw the convertible, still pulling into them, try to straighten. At this moment, the truck driver, alerted by horns and brakes behind him earlier, now slammed on his brakes instinctively.

The convertible in that brief instant raced toward the rear of the slowing truck on collision course.

At the last moment it was wheeled hard right, turning at a forty-five degree angle, going off the pavement, across the shoulders, down a ditch between stately chestnut trees, smashing hard into a five-foot hedgerow.

Illya battled the Citroen back into the inside lane of the highway. His

knuckles showed gray on the steering wheel. His mouth was a taut line and he breathed heavily through flared nostrils.

He kept his stricken gaze on the highway ahead.

Solo turned on the seat, watching the convertible disappear in the distance behind them. "I was just wondering—"

"Yes, Napoleon?"

"Where could we get breakfast at this hour? You and my grandmother have worked me up one ring-a-ding of an appetite."

FOUR

SOLO AND ILLYA walked into the offices of Lester Caillou in the Paris banking district at ten that morning.

The reception room, done in contemporary French styling, was vacant when they entered. A chair was pushed back from the receptionist's desk. The typewriter was uncovered. A telephone lay off its cradle.

Subdued voices washed in from the connecting office.

Illya wandered about the room, gazed through a window at the view of the gardens and the river beyond. Solo rapped at the inner door.

Instantly, the voices ceased. Presently, a tall young woman in tight skirt, white blouse, hair piled dark and high in a lacquered roll, came through the door and closed it carefully behind her.

"What do you wish?" she asked in French. Her face was pale.

"We wish to see Monsieur Lester Caillou," Solo said.

She tossed a troubled gaze across her shoulder, attempted a smile that made her wan cheeks more bleak. "M'sieur Caillou arrives at eleven o'clock."

Solo nodded. "Then we'll wait."

"Could I be of some service?" the girl asked, perspiring.

"But certainly," Illya said. "Tell M'sieur Caillou we are here."

"He arrives at eleven," the girl repeated, in French.

"She's lying," Illya said to Solo in English. "She's really lovely, though."

"Yes." Solo gazed admiringly at the secretary. "I'd say about forty-five —"

"Forty-five?" Illya looked astounded. "Twenty, perhaps."

"Forty-five-twenty-four-thirty-six," Solo said smiling. The girl smiled too, unwillingly. "That's better, Mam'selle. I wondered when you'd admit to speaking English."

"M'sieur Caillou still doesn't arrive until eleven," she said.

"We are old friends," Solo said. "Would he mind our waiting in his office?"

He walked past her and opened the door. She caught at his arm and he heard her sharp intake of breath.

Her gasp matched his own.

In the inner office, staring at him, stood Albert, Gizelle and a young blonde woman who appeared possessed of more physical assets than the World Bank itself.

The blonde also sported a swollen, purpled eye, and her left arm rode a sling. In her other hand she held a small, snubbed .25 caliber pistol.

"Do come on in, Mr. Solo," she said.

Across her shoulder, Solo spoke five sharp words: "Get out of here, Illya."

Illya beat a hasty retreat toward the connecting office door, but Solo barred their way.

The blonde said, "Don't force me to shoot you, Mr. Solo. Because of you, I'm lucky to be alive."

"You don't drive well, do you?" Solo said.

"Don't push it," she warned.

Albert and Gizelle caught him roughly, pulling him into the inner office.

Solo saw in surprise that the secretary followed.

"I don't understand this," she said shakily. "I don't know these people."

"You don't have to know us, Yvonne," the blonde said. "Just keep your mouth closed and do as you're told."

Yvonne sagged against the door, watching them.

The blonde nodded toward Solo. "Search him, Albert."

Albert moved warily around Solo, gripping his arms, pinning him helplessly. He motioned to Gizelle, who removed Solo's gun from its shoulder holster and then retreated as if relieved to be out of Solo's reach. Gizelle had learned one thing this morning: a healthy respect for her enemy.

"That's all," Gizelle said.

"Secure him," the blonde ordered.

"You'll look pretty wild walking me through the Rothschild bank building in handcuffs," Solo said.

She did not smile. "Allow us to fret over details."

With Albert holding Solo, Gizelle moved in warily. She clipped chained cuffs to Solo's wrists. The chains in turn were fastened to a metal belt about his waist, concealed by his jacket. The hidden chains permitted little movement of his arms but were unnoticeable unless one searched purposely.

"Ingenious," Solo said.

"You'll find we get everything we want—eventually," the blonde said. "All right. Let's go. You walk out between Albert and Gizelle. The first move you make, I fire this gun into your spine. You have a great deal more to lose at this moment than we do."

The corridor was vacant. The blonde nodded and Albert nudged Solo forward.

Solo walked between the hoodlums, aware the blonde was immediately behind, the small automatic concealed by her purse.

The elevator opened. The operator looked bored. "Down?"

"Ground floor," the blonde said.

Solo took one last check of the corridor. There was no sign of Illya. He sighed heavily, entered the ornate brass cage between Albert and Gizelle.

The blonde stood behind the operator, some feet from Solo.

Solo watched the floor-indicator, saw the red light calling for a stop at the third floor. He set himself.

As the operator lifted the handle to stop at the third floor, Solo brought his hand forward as far as the metal permitted, then slapped backward upon Albert's gloves as hard as possible.

His hunch was correct. Albert cried out in sudden pain. Gizelle screamed in reaction, lunging back away from Solo.

Solo snagged the tails of Gizelle's jacket, wrenching her between himself and the armed blonde.

The lift stopped, but before the door slid open the blonde acted.

She jabbed the gun in the operator's back. "Don't open that door—"

"But, madame—"

She pressed the gun harder. "This is police business. You will proceed to the ground floor. At once, without stopping."

By now, Albert had his agony under control. He held his painful hands out at his side, but used his bulky body to bull Solo back against the wall.

"Now, Mr. Solo," the blonde said. "What have you gained with your foolish games?"

Solo shrugged. "A good question. Unfortunately, I have no good answers."

At eleven Lester Caillou entered his inner office, accompanied by his secretary.

Caillou stopped so abruptly just within his door that Yvonne walked into him, and flustered, cried out apologetically.

Illya Kuryakin perched at ease in the window seat beyond Caillou's

desk. He swung his legs, watching them with intent interest.

Caillou gazed at him blankly, and then peered at his secretary. "Who is this man, Miss Petain? What is the meaning of this intrusion?"

Yvonne Petain was unable to reply. Flustered and unnerved by this incredible morning, she burst into tears.

"There you are," Illya said. "That explains everything."

Caillou stared a moment at his secretary, then he said placatingly, "It's all right, Yvonne. I will call you later. You may go now."

Yvonne stopped crying, gazing at her employer, her eyes red-rimmed. "You don't wish an alarm?"

"Of course not. This is no time for notoriety. I'm quite capable of handling this young man." He turned again toward Illya as the secretary closed the door behind her. There was still no faint light of recollection in his dark eyes. "How did you get in here?"

Now Illya stood up, finding that he gazed at Caillou as puzzledly as Yvonne had. First, Caillou seemed at ease, master of all situations as Illya remembered him from the wild days in Iran.

Yet hadn't Solo pegged Caillou's behavior at Orly Airport as surreptitious, the actions of a man sick with fright?

And most mystifying of all, why couldn't Caillou remember him? If it hadn't been for him and Solo, Caillou's carcass would now be rotting under a few feet of desert sand.

Still, the shaky condition of world finance, of the World Bank itself, could explain erratic behavior, even Caillou's not recognizing him at once, unexpectedly confronting him in his own office.

"Why shouldn't I get in here?" Illya asked, watching the banker. The years had made inroads. The thin face was lined, the hair grayer, the eyes less lively. "In France one can always find someone to bribe, eh?"

Caillou did not smile.

Illya laughed. "And anyhow, an old Arab buddy of yours from firing squad days like me—who would be heartless enough to deny me entrance through your private exit?"

Caillou studied him intently. A look of relief washed across his face.

He came around the desk, hand extended. "Of course! How stupid of me! Of course, you're Il1—Illya—"

"Kuryakin," Illya said warmly, shaking hands.

"Kuryakin, the man who saved me from a firing squad. How good it is to see you again, *ma chere ami*."

He nodded toward a leather chair pulled near his ornate desk. He placed his hat upon a hat tree, studied himself in the dark mirror, sat behind his desk.

"You met another old friend a few nights ago, Lester," Illya said. "At Orly Airport. You didn't recognize him, either."

Caillou appeared to search desperately in the files of his mind. "Solo—Napoleon Solo?"

Illya smiled. "He was upset when you brushed him off."

"Brushed Solo off? What does this mean? I was upset. Yes. This terrible business. So much on my mind. I hope you will apologize to him." Then Caillou sank back, hardly at ease, even in his own office. "In what way may I serve you?"

Illya grinned. "Solo and I had hoped to be of service to you— with your help, of course."

"Anything. But how could you hope to serve me?"

"I'm sure it's no news to you that the dollar, the pound and the ruble have been devalued in the world market. A sudden, inexplicable drop in their value, a demand for gold payments—"

"A desperate situation—for some countries."

Illya stared at him, frowning. "Lester! Those nations lead the world."

"Perhaps it is time for a new world leader."

"Is this you talking? Surely De Gaulle's government knows a devalued dollar will further depress the franc—"

"It is nothing Bon Charlie would wish."

Illya leaned forward. "We've a good idea who would want panic and fiscal chaos. That's why I've come to you."

"Me?"

Caillou straightened. "What would I have to do with such matters?"

"You've gotten nervous since the old days in Iran," Kuryakin said. "Staying alive in the world of finance can be a slower, but more agonizing death than that of the firing squad, my friend."

"We plan to expose the plot to wreck money values. We plan to expose the people behind it. I came to you as an old friend to enlist your aid in checking on the actions taken in international monetary affairs. We believe that through you, we can locate the people responsible and expose them."

After a moment Caillou nodded. "Naturally I'll do anything I can."

Illya smiled and stood up. "Good. This is what we were sure we'd hear from you."

"What else would you anticipate to hear from an old friend?"

Illya laughed and nodded. "Right. You see, I still wear it." He held up his wrist, shooting his cuff and displaying the twin to the Swiss chronometer worn by Solo.

"What?" Caillou looked confused.

"The watch, Lester!"

Caillou gazed at the watch, puzzled. "Yes. Very nice watch, indeed."

Illya caught his breath and retreated a step, staring at the banker.

Caillou stiffened. "What's wrong, old friend?"

Illya dampened his lips with the tip of his tongue. "Nothing, *old friend*, I've just sort of goofed, that's all."

He continued to back across the lavishly furnished office, not taking his gaze from Caillou's face. He reached behind him, turned the knob. He opened the door, stepped out into the midoffice of the suite.

Closing Caillou's door, Illya turned and walked swiftly toward the reception room.

Entering it, he heard the rasping buzz of the intercom summon Yvonne into Caillou's inner

Yvonne sat at her desk, face gray. She ignored the buzzer. She stared up at Illya.

"It's been one of those mornings when nothing goes right, hasn't it?" Illya said sympathetically. He walked out.

The buzzer continued waspishly. Yvonne got up, entered Caillou's office.

Caillou stood in the center of the room. He held out a small card with a telephone number on it. His hand shook.

"Get me a private, outside line," he ordered. "Call this number."

"For whom shall I ask?"

Caillou's voice crackled in rage.

"Never mind! Just get me the outside line. I'll talk to whoever answers."

PART TWO

INCIDENT OF A WORLD IN PANIC

ILLYA OPENED the corridor door of Caillou's office and stepped outside.

"Kuryakin!"

The name was whispered at him, hissed.

He wheeled around. He was not fast enough. As he turned, leaded gloves smashed across his eyes. He grunted in pain, and so did Albert.

Sickness spread out through Illya from the bridge of his nose.

Rocked on his heels, Illya staggered. He toppled against a wall and shook his head, trying to clear it.

Albert advanced upon him.

Illya gazed up through an occluding red haze at the pointed beard and old-bronze features of the Moor.

The Moor laughed. "So I get you at last, eh?"

Illya managed to speak lightly through the pain clouding his mind. "What kept you?"

Albert showed him the snout of a Biretta. "Never mind that. Do you come quietly?"

Illya looked at the gun.

"The only way to go," he said. He straightened. Albert inclined his head toward the rear of the corridor.

"I warn you," Albert said. "Do not push me. You are worth nothing to us alive."

"You keep talking like this, Albert, and I'll begin to think you don't like me," Illya said.

Albert snorted. "Keep walking."

They passed the bank of public lifts, walked to the service elevator.

Keeping the gun fixed on Illya, Albert pressed the button.

The doors parted. Albert motioned with the gun. Illya preceded him into the cage

The elevator plunged downward.

Suddenly Illya lurched toward the controls, grabbed the lever, thrusting it downward.

Albert pressed the trigger instinctively,

The sound was like a cannon in the metal cage.

The roar reverberated through the well, bouncing off the sump and the roof.

The bullet imbedded itself inches from Illya in the metal. He wheeled around, whistling. "I never thought you'd do that. They must have heard that in every part of this building!"

"I could have gotten you between the eyes if I wished."

"What would you do carrying a corpse around?"

"Keep pushing me! You will find out!" Albert stepped forward, waving the gun. "Let go of that handle!"

As he spoke he reached out for it.

"As you say," Illya said. He held his breath, timing it perfectly.

He released the handle. It flew upward as Albert's hand came toward it.

Albert screamed in pain as the handle slapped across his agonized hand.

Illya brought his fist upward, sinking it wrist-deep under Albert's belt. Albert fired again, the shot going into the flooring. Illya chopped Albert across the neck with the side of his hand.

For what seemed a breathless eternity, Albert stood unmoving, staring at Illya in a mixture of pain and contempt.

Illya caught his breath. His hand ached as if he had karate-chopped a four-by-four, and yet the big Moor continued to stand, peering at him.

The elevator moved downward again.

Illya stood tautly, waiting for the Moor to attack him again.

Albert disintegrated gradually.

First, his gloved hand loosened and the gun toppled to the flooring.

Then a strange new emptiness veiled his eyes, they rolled up on their sockets.

Albert slumped to his knees. He gazed up at Illya for another moment as if unable to believe what was happening to him. Then, as the elevator stopped, its doors parted, he sprawled forward on his face and lay still, in the elevator doorway.

For a moment Illya hesitated. Through the open door he saw the elevator had reached a supply basement.

He knelt, took up the gun Albert had dropped. Then he dropped it into his pocket and stepped across the prone hoodlum's form.

He paused, gazing down at the unconscious man.

"I do hope you won't be too inconvenienced explaining to your friends how this happened, old fellow."

Illya turned then and hurried toward an alley exit.

TWO

GIZELLE UNLOCKED the door on the third floor of a sidestreet hotel.

Solo waited politely, but the blonde put her hand in the small of his back and thrust him forward into the room,

Gizelle and the blonde followed. The blonde locked the door, removed the key and dropped it down into her copious bosom.

"Marie," Gizelle said, worried. "Where is Albert? He should be here by now."

The blonde gazed at her coldly. "Can't you live five minutes without that Moor?"

Gizelle winced. "I would not be in—this—except for Albert. This is not my kind of thing."

Marie laughed harshly. "No. We know what kind of thing yours is—luring suckers into the alley for your precious Albert to mug them. You're in something big this time. If you do what you're told, maybe you and your sweet Albert will have enough so you won't have to rob drunks in an alley anymore."

Gizelle walked to the window and stood staring down at the street.

She shivered.

Marie's voice rasped at Gizelle. "Come take this gun and guard him. I must call the doctor at once."

"Aren't you feeling well, Marie?" Solo inquired in mock solicitude.

Marie lashed out, shoving Solo, and he fell upon the bed on his back. "And stay there—"

"Alone? Like this?"

"And keep quiet." She spoke over her shoulder. "Come on, Gizelle."

Take the gun."

Gizelle crossed the room unwillingly.

She took the gun reluctantly. Solo saw that her earlier encounter had left her frightened, even when she held the artillery.

Marie backed to the French phone, lifted the receiver.

Solo made a false leap toward Gizelle. The dark-skinned girl screamed and almost dropped the gun.

Marie threw the phone into its cradle, ran across to her. Her face was livid.

"The next time he does a thing like that," Marie raved, "shoot him."

Gizelle nodded numbly.

Marie turned, her face twisted. She placed her hands on her hips. "You think I don't know how to quiet you down?"

Solo grinned up at her. "I know how to quiet you down, too, Marie."

Marie tossed her blonde head in contempt. "Is that all you think about—love?"

"If you've never thought about it, Marie, don't knock it," Solo said.

"Save this kind of talk for women like Gizelle—"

"I like big blondes, Marie."

"You'll never get me in your arms."

"That's too bad. You don't know what you're missing—"

"Huh!" Marie's mouth twisted. "All men are pigs."

"That's why you're so full of war, Marie," Solo taunted her. "You hate love."

"I hate men."

"Sure. And you're turning to vinegar."

After a moment of staring down at Solo, unblinking, Marie returned to the phone.

Gizelle retreated a couple of steps, holding the gun on Solo in a trembling hand.

Solo smiled at her. "I think you'd be happier back in the alleys, Marie."

Her chin tilted. "We are going to be rich."

"You and Albert?"

"That's right. We are through with the old life. We will be rich."

"Albert tell you that?"

"Be quiet!" Marie ordered. "This call is important."

Solo lay silently on the old iron four-poster bed, watching the blonde at the phone. She spoke finally, "Hello, Doctor. Marie. That's why I called you. No. I have not failed this time. I told you I would not. No, I don't have both of them. I have Napoleon Solo, and soon the other one will be here. Albert is returned to find him now. Cars are coming for us? How soon may we expect them?"

Solo sat up on the bed as Marie continued to speak with deference and servility to the "doctor" on the phone.

"Stay there," Gizelle ordered weakly. She tilted up the gun.

"Press the trigger, Gizelle," Solo said.

She winced, her face bleak.

"I don't want to have to kill you," she said, almost pleading.

Solo stood up. "Looks like you'll have to, Gizelle."

Marie slapped her hand over the phone speaker. "Shoot him, you fool!"

Solo leaped forward, going around the table. He caught at Marie, slipping his arm about her waist, putting her between him and Gizelle.

Marie was raging crazily at her. Gizelle whispered frantically, "Oh, Albert—"

"Albert won't help you now!" Marie raged. "I tell you, shoot him." She spoke again into the phone. "No, Doctor, I assure you everything's under control here."

"The doctor's going to think you're an awful liar," Solo whispered into Marie's ear.

She kicked backward, striking his shins with her pointed heel.

Solo gasped, but tightened his grasp on her. As she tried to replace the receiver, he caught it.

He ripped it from her grasp, brought it across her throat. Marie gasped, wheeling them around. She was stronger than Solo had believed.

Gizelle fired. Only the fact that she was trembling in terror saved either Solo, her target, or Marie. The bullet whipped past them, splatting against the wall.

Solo caught the wire, looping it around Marie's arms. He spun her until the wire held her immobile. She spat at him, raging.

Across her head, Solo saw that Gizelle had retreated to the door. She braced herself against it, holding the smoking gun at arm length as though she hated it almost as much as she feared it.

"Shoot him!" Marie raged at Gizelle.

Reaching across Marie's shoulder, Solo thrust his hand down the front of her dress, coming up with keys to his cuffs and the door.

"Delightful cache you have there, my dear," Solo said.

Marie swore at him in blistering French, English and Italian.

Holding Marie before him, Solo unlocked his cuffs, let them fall before him.

Then he loosened the chain about his waist.

As Marie raged, he snapped one of the cuffs on her. Then he thrust her forward, moving her toward Gizelle.

The dark-skinned girl wailed at them. "Stay there! Stay away from me!"

Her hand shook so badly she almost dropped the gun.

Marie screamed at her.

Suddenly Gizelle wheeled around, grabbing at the doorknob, trying to fight her way from the room.

Solo pushed Marie against her. He snapped one of the cuffs on Gizelle. The Arab girl sobbed, between rage and relief.

Solo reached out and took the gun from her unprotesting fingers. It was as if she were pleased to lose it.

Solo led them at the end of the chain to the foot of the bed. He locked the chain to the iron post.

"I'll leave you girls now," he said. "I know you've got a lot to say to each other."

Marie turned the air blue with her swearing.

Solo spoke to Gizelle. "She's beginning to repeat herself. Why don't you teach her some Arabic?"

Marie spat at him again, frustrated.

Solo stood another moment, regarding them. "You might pull the bed over to the phone, but you've pulled the phone out of the wall." He shook his head. "Au revoir, Marie, Gizelle. I hope you're able to think of something except bad words."

"You pig!" Marie wailed at him. "Are you such a fool that you believe the doctor will let you get away with this?"

He locked the hotel room door behind him. As he came off the lower step, he could hear Marie screaming.

At the street door he paused. A black sedan sped into the street and slammed to a screeching stop at the curb.

Holding his breath, Solo retreated into the shadowed hall. The doors were thrown open on the car. Four men piled out, hurrying across the walk.

Solo leaned against the wall until the four of them ran past him, going up the steps. When the last one was on the first landing, Solo stepped through the door, went down to the sidewalk and walked away rapidly.

He did not look back.

Twenty minutes later he reached the hotel where he had registered earlier with Illya.

As he took the key from the room clerk, he caught a faint shiftiness in the man's eyes. He went taut, thinking that death played with you—it missed you only by inches—it had allies everywhere.

Two men moved from chairs to ward the elevator. Solo saw them from the corners of his eyes.

He thanked the room clerk, turned away. He walked toward the elevator, at the last moment changed his mind and strode swiftly into the stairwell.

He ran up the steps. At the second floor, he looked back; the two men were following him.

He moved against the wall, going upward swiftly.

Panting, he came out of the stairwell on the fifth floor. The first thing he saw was a man standing too casually at the far end of the corridor.

He turned, seeing another at the other end. He shifted his jacket up on his shoulders, thinking that the doctor worked swiftly when aroused.

The two men moved away from their posts. Behind him, Solo heard the hurrying steps on the stairs.

He strode purposefully, trying to conceal any sign of panic, toward his door. He held his key ready to thrust it into the lock. Then he thought: even if he made it that far there was no time to unlock the door. They'd be on him.

He reached for his gun, realizing in that instant that it was gone and that he had alerted the two men who might not until this moment have been certain he was their prey.

He walked faster, reaching the key toward the lock. But as his hand touched the door, it was pulled open.

He hesitated, seeing they were waiting for him everywhere, and he had walked into a trap.

He would have retreated, but Illya reached out, snagged his wrist, jerked him through the opening. Illya slammed the door in the faces of the pursuers.

"Welcome to the Tower of London," Illya said.

Solo flinched, "How about this? Prisoners, at twenty-five dollars a day!"

Illya exhaled and sat down on the bed. "They've been out there for some time. I tried to go out, but they were unpleasant about it, and I changed my mind. I've been thinking about calling the law."

Solo exhaled. "We are the law, Illya."

Kuryakin grinned. "Oh, yes. I keep forgetting. This means we're in something of a real bind then, doesn't it?"

"If you care for understatement."

Solo prowled the room. From his window he saw men standing in the street below, peering up at him.

Solo lifted his gaze. In windows across the busy street he saw other men, armed with guns, telescopes, fixed on his window.

He retreated a step.

He spoke over his shoulder. "The doctor is really mad with us."

"Who's the doctor?" Illya said.

"It beats me."

He moved his gaze across the faces of the watching men, men in shadows, without faces, standing tautly. They waited down there, and he knew they were in the corridors.

"That's the way I feel about Caillou," Illya said behind him.

Solo moved away from the window.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Caillou. It beats me." Illya shook his head. "I got back into his office. I waited in there until he came in."

"You talked to him?"

"I talked to Caillou's face."

"What are you talking about?"

Illya scowled. "I only learned one thing in that office. The man I talked to isn't Caillou."

Solo stared at him. "Are you coming unglued?"

"I don't know. I may be. All I know for sure is that the man in Caillou's office is no more Caillou than I am." Illya paced. "Are you sure the man you met that night at Orly was Caillou?"

Solo considered. Finally, he nodded. "It was Caillou, all right. He recognized me—"

"And your watch?"

"Yes. It was Caillou. Besides, they tried to kill Caillou. That night."

They sat some moments in silence, trying to add what they had. At last, Illya said, "Suppose that man at Orly was really Caillou. Suppose he was trying to get away."

Solo nodded. "Sure. THRUSH got something on him. They forced him to go along with them. Then it got so bad that Caillou couldn't stomach it. He tried to run. They were after him—that's why he was so scared when I spoke his name. Out on the runway they tried to kill him—"

"Maybe they have," Illya said.

"I didn't see him any more. Albert and his Arab girlfriend pushed me in a corner—"

"Then they must have finished Caillou off and put a ringer in his place at the banking company. The guy there didn't know me until I told him who I was. And he had no idea at all that the real Caillou had given me this watch!"

"Little trivia that THRUSH's computers overlooked," Solo said.

"How about this?" Illya said, his eyes glowing as he figured the angles. "THRUSH saw that Caillou was going to be hard to handle, so they got a ringer ready to run in his place. Only Caillou broke and ran ahead of time, and we showed up, and that forced them to bring in the ringer —"

"Before he was fully briefed!" Solo nodded. "They had to use him

before he was ready."

"Which brings us right back to the *real* Caillou. Where is he? Is he still alive? Dead?"

"That's not fair. You've got all the questions and I don't have any answers."

"We've got to find the real Caillou, haven't we? Before the ringer can really take his place?"

"There you go with the questions again."

"We can't sit around here, can we? How are we going to get out of here?"

"I told you! Try with some answers already."

"Are you nuts? If I had answers, I wouldn't have to stand around here yakking like this."

A knocking at the door rasped across his words. Solo and Illya exchanged glances. The knock was repeated, frantic now.

Illya pounced across the room like a lynx. He pressed his face against the door facing. "Who's there?"

"I. Yvonne. Please. Let me in. Hurry!"

"Wonder what your grandmother would say in this situation?" Illya said. He slapped off the locks, opened the door.

His eyes widened.

Two men bore down on Caillou's terrified secretary from both ways along the corridor. Their guns were drawn. As they reached out for her, Illya grasped her extended arm and yanked her through the opening.

She went stumbling across the room, trying to catch her balance.

"Solo!" Illya whispered.

Solo leaped to his aid. He struck the door with his shoulder as the men outside landed against it. During the next fraction of a second, which seemed an hour, the door trembled, neither closed, nor open.

Then the lock clicked into place. Illya slapped the second lock into place, and he and Solo sagged against the door, sighing.

They stared at the secretary, who finally had straightened and stood facing them, her eyes wide, swimming with fright.

"I hope you don't mind," Illya said to Yvonne, "if I ask you a few questions."

"He's a bear for questions," Solo said. "Not much for answers, but wild with questions."

Illya stared at Yvonne. "How did you get in here?"

She stared at him, her full lips parted. "You helped me in! Those men —"

"Those men just let you walk up to the door?"

"Yes. Then they came running toward me—"

"All right. We'll let that go for now. How did you know where to find us?"

She frowned. "Why, I knew all along. We got a telegram from the director of the World Bank saying you and Mr. Solo would be at this hotel, that you would visit Mr. Caillou, and we were to offer you every assistance."

"You mind my saying I don't believe you?" Illya said.

"Another question," Solo interposed.

Yvonne straightened angrily. She looked even more intriguing with her shoulders back. "If you doubt me, then I will leave," she said. "I will not stay where I am not trusted."

She turned and strode across the room to the window.

Solo sprinted from the door. She wheeled around, gazing at him in terror as he raced toward her. He thrust her away from the window as a bullet splatted into its sill.

She toppled this time, landing hard on the carpeting. She stared up at them, her lips quivering.

"We're only trying to make you feel at home," Illya said.

"I want to get out of here," Yvonne sobbed.

Illya shrugged. "We share your sentiments. But at the moment we're not sure just how to work it."

"What he means is," Solo said, "we don't have an idea in the world."

Solo helped Yvonne to her feet and led her to a couch. He sat down with her, dabbing at her eyes with his handkerchief.

"How come you take all the best assignments?" Illya said.

Solo put his arm about Yvonne. She was on the brink of hysterics.

"Why did you come here, Yvonne"

Her lips trembled. "I need help. My employer, Monsieur Caillou, needs help. Something is wrong. I never saw him act like he did today."

"There was something wrong with him today, all right," Illya agreed.

She looked up, troubled. "Oh, did you notice it, too?"

"In what ways did he seem strange to you?" Solo prompted.

"In the calls he made. In the people who came to visit him—people I have never seen before. He didn't know where anything was. His temper, so short—Monsieur Caillou is one of the most patient of men."

"This was one of his off days," Illya told her.

"Something is very wrong," Yvonne persisted. "As soon as Monsieur Caillou left the office today, I came looking for you. I hoped you could help him."

"At the moment I'm afraid we could use a spot of help ourselves," Illya said.

Solo said, "Where did Caillou go when he finally left his office, Yvonne?"

"I don't know. To his chateau, I suppose."

"Do you know where it is'?"

"Yes, of course."

Solo sighed heavily. "Suppose we were some way able to get out of this room, Yvonne. Would you take us to Caillou's chateau?"

"But of course."

Solo grinned. "Well, that part was easy." He stared at Yvonne a moment, and then at Illya. "Suppose you start, Yvonne, by giving Illya your dress."

"What?" Yvonne stared at him.

"I echo that," Illya said. "I don't even want her dress. It'll never fit me."

But Yvonne was already loosening zippers, pulling the dress up over her head.

Her hair mussed, her face flushed, Yvonne handed her dress to Solo. He gazed a moment, admiring her in a black lace slip, then tossed the dress to Illya.

"Put it on," he told Kuryakin. "Give Yvonne your clothes."

"I'll just go in the bathroom to change," Illya said. "After all, I'm not wearing a black lace slip." He took a step toward the bath, paused. "You mind saying why I'm doing this?"

"That dress is your color," Solo told him. "It will do magic things for your eyes. Besides, if you can get out in the hall, make the guards out there think you're Yvonne until they get close enough, you can explode a gas pill. That'll give us time to clear out of here."

Illya shook his head. "With me looking like a female impersonator."

"This is Paris," Solo told him. "Don't fight. Switch."

As Illya turned toward the bath room again, there was a knock on the door. He hesitated, tautly, glanced across his shoulder. "I had no idea we were so popular."

Solo crossed the room. He stood

"Bellboy, M'sieur. I have a message."

"Push it under the door."

There was a pause. Then, "I'm afraid I can't do that, sir."

Solo and Illya exchanged knowing glances.

"Here we go again," Solo said. He spoke toward the door again. "Just a moment."

Illya tossed the dress to Yvonne. "Put it back on. We've just abandoned Plan One. Alternate Plan Ten."

"Plan Ten?" Yvonne stared at him, puzzled. "What on earth is Plan Ten?"

"Pray a little," Illya told her.

They waited for Yvonne to pull on her dress, straighten it. She was still yanking at zippers, patting at her hair, when Solo caught her arm and pulled her close against the wall behind him at the doorway.

"Monsieur?" the bellboy said in his calmest, most polite tone.

Yvonne was trembling, her teeth chattering.

Solo gave her a pen-sized aluminum vial with a plastic cone at its top.

"Oxygen," he told her. "What ever you do, don't take that nose cone from your face until we're out of here."

The bellboy called again, impatiently. "M'sieur, the message is most urgent."

"I'm anxious to get it," Solo called pleasantly. "I'm just not quite ready for guests."

He stared at Illya, pressed against the wall, across the door from him. Illya nodded.

They timed their movements precisely.

As Solo unlocked and opened the door, thrusting it wide, Illya smashed a gas-pill upon the floor.

Instantly, grey clouds of smoke erupted from the carpeting. The room turned white with smoke.

In that same moment, the bell boy was thrust into the room ahead of two armed men.

They were carried forward into the room under their own impetus.

"This is the message—" The man stopped talking, his nostrils attacked by the acrid gray gas.

The three of them heeled around, trying to retreat.

Illya slammed the door and stepped out in front of it.

The bellhop fell to the carpeting, gagging.

One of the men turned all the way around, swinging his gun, blinded by the gas. Illya waited until he was faced away from him, then clipped him across the neck.

Solo struck the other in the belly, and when he folded forward, he chopped him across the back of his neck. The two men hit the carpeting at almost the same time as their guns did.

Yvonne stood rigid against the wall. Above the plastic nose cone, her eyes were wide.

Illya scooped up one of the guns, Solo the other. Leading Yvonne by the elbow, Solo opened the door and thrust her into the corridor. He and Illya moved beside her, fingers on the triggers of the guns.

The corridor appeared empty.

Wild-eyed, Yvonne kept the cone covering her face, though Illya and Solo had removed theirs.

With Solo leading the way and Illya guarding their rear, they ran along the hall to the elevator bank. Solo pressed a button.

The elevator appeared almost at once. The doors slid open. Solo, Illya and Yvonne retreated as if executing a ballet step. Two armed thugs moved forward from the elevator.

"Sorry," Illya said, "we've changed our mind."

He tossed a gas pellet into the cage as Solo slapped at the down button.

A thug raised his gun to fire as the doors slid closed on him. Down the elevator glided. For a moment they could hear the thugs coughing and yelling for help.

They turned, running again.

Solo pushed open the stairway door. They went through it.

They paused beside the up-and-down flights.

"You go up," Solo said. "We'll go down. That way, part of us have a chance of getting out of here."

Illya gave them a jaunty salute and bounded up the stairs.

Holding Yvonne's elbow tightly, Solo moved them toward the down stairwell.

Yvonne cried out and staggered against him.

Solo got no more than a glimpse of the two men at the landing below them. He swung around, dragging Yvonne after him. They ran up the stairs.

Illya paused, waiting, staring down at them. "What's wrong?"

"We decided to go with you," Solo said.

"That's too bad, because I'd just decided to go with you," Illya said. He jerked his head upward. "Gun boys—two flights up."

Solo nodded toward the exit; "Go out on this floor."

Illya nodded. He held the door open. They heard men running down the stairs and up them. They ran out into the corridor. They turned toward the elevators, but at this moment one of them opened and two men ran out, guns drawn.

Illya fired instinctively. The two men ducked back into the elevator cage.

Solo dragged Yvonne after him. They ran toward the end of the corridor.

"It's six floors straight down that way," Illya warned.

"You got any better ideas?" Solo panted across his shoulder.

"I'm with you," Illya said. He turned, firing again to discourage the gunmen from leaving the elevator.

The stairway door opened, then closed.

Doors along the corridor were thrown open. Women screamed and men yelled, demanding to know what was going on.

Illya laughed, pleased. The more crowded the corridor, the safer they were.

Solo thrust up the window, swung his legs through. Illya opened his mouth to yell until he saw the metal rails of a fire-escape.

He followed Yvonne through the window to the fire-escape landing. He slammed the window closed. Solo took a step downward, but bullets struck the metal railings near him, singing.

"High-powered rifle!" Illya gasped.

Solo turned, pushing Yvonne ahead of him.

"Where to?" Illya said.

"Up," Solo said, as bullets whistled past them. "Where else?"

They clambered up the old iron fire-escape to the seventh floor.

Illya reached for the window to open it when he saw two men running along the seventh floor corridor with guns drawn.

Illya, spent, sagged back against Yvonne.

"Up again," he said.

They climbed swiftly. Below, they heard screaming. The streets teemed with people, stirring like ants in a broken nest.

Illya paused, gazing down. "They watching us get knocked off?"

Solo shook his head, still climbing. "No. It's a run on the banks. rioting against the government. THRUSH has got the world in a panic."

"It's doing a fair job on me," Illya said.

Bullets whistled past them, the sound of gunfire nearer.

Yvonne whimpered, pointing to the floors below, where armed men clambered through windows. They paused only to fire.

Illya spoke gently to Yvonne. "Don't be scared. Bullets lose their thrust fired up at this angle. At least that's what they told me in ballistics.

Hope they knew what they were talking about. Is that really true, Napoleon?"

Solo did not answer. He was already over the wall on the hotel roof. Yvonne struggled. Illya helped her over the parapet before he saw what had struck Solo dumb.

Illya stared. Parked on the roof were two of the smallest, reddest helicopters he had ever seen, their blades churning as if they were idling, waiting.

He glanced below. The armed men poured upward on the metal ladders. Shrugging, Illya climbed the wall and stood beside Solo.

Two men in brown zippered flight suits stood near the small helicopters, holding their high-powered rifles negligently.

Illya stared at the impassive faces. There was no doubting they were THRUSH hirelings, as were the gunmen still racing up the fire-escape ladder.

"This is where they were chasing us the whole time," Illya said in disgust.

Solo nodded. He glanced at Yvonne. "You can take that nose-cone away from your face now, Yvonne."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "I'm not breathing anyway."

THREE

THE FLIGHT-SUITED men motioned them politely into the small helicopters. They were most gentlemanly, except that they gestured with guns.

When Solo and Yvonne were in one helicopter, the pilot pressed a button. The small seats compressed tighter, locking them in and metal bands clicked together securely across their chests and legs. Neither of them could move.

Led toward the other helicopter, Illya suddenly swung around, lunging at the pilot.

The man side-stepped almost boredly, and clubbed Illya with the butt

of his rifle. Then he lifted Illya as if he were a sack of potatoes and slung him into the rear of the copter.

The helicopters winged upward from the hotel roof like frightened pigeons.

Solo fought at the metal bands, but he was bound helplessly. He found Yvonne in tears when he glanced at her. He tried to think of some comforting words, but there were none.

The city, the fabled river, the dust-glinting trees whipped past below them. The helicopter circled on the outskirts of Paris, hovered above a chateau, hundreds of years old, majestic and isolated within its own park.

Yvonne stared numbly downward through the plastic bubble. She gazed blankly at Solo.

Solo glanced down. The turrets and roof of the chateau gleamed in the afternoon sunlight. Bright cars by the dozens were sunning quietly in the drive.

The helicopter dipped downward, angling in toward the lawn.

Yvonne shook her head. "Why, that's M'sieur Caillou's own chateau!"

The pilot spoke coldly. "That's right."

Yvonne's voice was puzzled. "They're having a reception for the men and women of the emergency international monetary meeting!"

"If I'd known it was a party," Solo said, "I'd have worn a tux."

The pilot said, "You two were not invited—to the party."

Solo stared at the pilot incredulously. "Those are brilliant world leaders down there."

"So?"

"You think you can put us down there and not attract their attention?"

"Their minds are on more important matters," the pilot said calmly. "Banks are closing all over the world." He shrugged. "Anyhow, we've been delivering guests, just like this, all afternoon."

Solo did not speak. The helicopter put down on its tricycle under

carriage on the spacious lawn. The second small chopper followed within seconds.

No one came out of the house. Through French windows Solo saw formally attired people gathered in worried knots, lost on the distressed tension in the afternoon.

The pilot pressed a button and the seat and metal bands relaxed their tenacious grip on Solo and Yvonne. The pilot left his rifle inside the chopper, but kept his hand on a clearly outlined automatic in his flight-suit pocket.

"Get out, nice and easy," he ordered.

Solo followed Yvonne, jumping out to the ground. Across a short space the other pilot knelt over Illya, passing an ammonia vial back and forth under his nose.

Illya resisted for a moment, then revived suddenly and violently. He sprang upward as if catapulted, carrying the pilot with him. The man yelled, going over on his back.

Illya closed his hands on the pilot's throat and they toppled out of the copter hatch. They struck the ground hard.

Illya did not surrender his advantage. He chopped the pilot across the Adam's apple, drove his extended hand into his solar plexus, and leaped up—in the face of the drawn gun of the other pilot.

"Hold it," the pilot said, fixing his gun on Illya, but ready to wheel around on Solo.

Solo stood unmoving. "Vengeance is a big thing with you, isn't it, Kuryakin?"

Illya stared at him groggily. "Where were you?"

The pilot said, "All right, you two. Grab that pilot. Help him up."

Solo shrugged. He and Illya hefted the gagging pilot to his feet and they crossed the lawn toward the side of the stone chateau. Frivolous music blared out from the windows, somehow like a desecration.

"Hold it," the pilot with the gun said when they reached what appeared to be a solid wall in the base of a high-rising turret.

Holding the automatic on them, the pilot edged warily to the wall,

shoved a lever concealed in the stone. A door-sized opening was made as the stones slid into themselves silently.

The pilot jerked his head, ordering them inside.

When they were on the landing at the head of wide stone steps leading to the depth of a silent dungeon, the pilot pressed an inside lever and the wall closed.

"Down the steps," he said.

They came off the stairs into a vaguely lighted foyer, devoid of furniture. A man armed with a rifle stood at each of the four walls. A door opened and Marie, Albert and Gizelle emerged, none looking too healthy.

"Here they are, Marie," the pilot

Marie reached out and grasped a gun from the nearest guard.

"I'll kill them now!" she said.

Solo and Illya released the pilot and he struck the floor hard. Marie jerked the rifle up to her shoulder.

A voice crackled from a concealed speaker. It was Oriental in its inflections and quality, cultured in tone: "Until I order it, Marie, you will kill no one."

Marie lowered the rifle, but her face was livid.

"I want them!" she answered defiantly. "Especially this Solo. I will deliver his skin to you—in strips!"

The Oriental voice remained at a conversational pitch, but chilled with its authority. "Perhaps you will. In good time. Don't let hatred suspend your reason. We do not need the notoriety of murder just now, my girl. Why else do you think we brought them here, in stead of leaving their corpses at the hotel? In order to indulge your violent whims? I need not remind you—I had better not have to remind you again—that we walk on eggs until our plan is in operation. I'll tell you when, my dear. Until then— remember—I see everything that goes on."

Marie exhaled heavily, and thrust the gun out to the guard, who retrieved it silently.

The three prisoners were prodded across the empty foyer to an empty dungeon.

A door creaked open.

"Inside," the guards said.

Yvonne pressed close to Solo.

"What kind of a place is this?" she whispered in terror.

"I know what it looks like," Illya said. "It looks like something from an old Errol Flynn movie."

PART THREE:

INTERLUDE AT A FRENCH CHATEAU

SILENCE DRIPPED oppressively in the thick-walled dungeon. There were no chairs, stools, cots—not even straw upon the stone flooring.

A deeply inset window, eight feet above the floor, shone with remote light. Making a stirrup of his clasped hands. Illya boosted Solo, who then chinned himself up to the sill and hung there, staring through the bars at a limited square of lawn and drive.

Illya sank against a wall, crossed his legs and closed his eyes.

Yvonne prowled the room. She shook the door, struck the rough walls with her small fists.

She stared down at Illya. Her voice quivered with outrage. "Why would M'sieur Caillou treat me in this brutal manner? Why would he do this to you, his friends?"

Illya spoke gently. "Don't fret about him."

"I've always revered him. Now I hate him."

"Don't hate M'sieur Caillou."

"Don't you?"

Illya gazed up at her. "I think, Yvonne, no matter where Lester Caillou is right now, it's a worse spot than we're in."

Solo spoke from the window, where he had supported himself on his elbows. His voice was strained with effort. "The party's over—the guests are leaving."

Yvonne said worriedly, "Is that good?"

Solo glanced down at her. "It means that the Caillou on duty up there got away with it. It means the good doctor, whoever he is, will have time for us now."

Sudden screaming of sirens replaced the wail of inane music. Solo pulled himself closer to the bars, clinging to them.

"Les flics!" Yvonne cried. "The police! It is the police, isn't it?"

Solo stared through the bars a moment, then let himself drop within the dungeon.

"Something's fouled them up!" he said in triumph.

"Maybe it was this," Illya said in mock casualness. He touched at an inch-long cylinder pinned at his lapel.

Solo put his head back, laughing in pleasure.

"You've been broadcasting distress bleeps!"

Illya nodded. "As fast as my little transistors would work." He smiled faintly. "I don't like to sit around idle."

The thick dungeon door was hurled open. Its brass knob gouged into the stone wall.

Albert, Marie and three guards charged into the room like a task force.

Albert carried a small machine pistol.

"All right," Albert snapped the order. "You two. Solo, Kuryakin. Let's go!"

Yvonne cried out. "Don't leave me alone down here!"

Illya bounced to his feet without touching his hands to the floor. Gently, he touched at her cheek with the backs of his fingers. He smiled at her. "Don't worry. I've a feeling we'll be back. Soon."

Albert laughed. "Don't count on it."

Marie smiled, too. "This time your cleverness has carried you too far."

TWO

A GUARD OPENED the double doors of a room on the third floor of the chateau.

Solo and Illya stepped into a room of incredible elegance. It left them for the moment speechless.

The large, high-ceilinged room was part of a suite done in an early Eastern dynasty decor, featuring blood reds and ebony blacks.

In the center of this luxury reclined a man of Siamese ancestry. Before him was a low, bone white table.

He sat with his long legs crossed. He wore a silk suit of deep black, a white shirt and white cravat. His face was like ancient writing paper made of rice. It looked as if it would tear or crack if touched. His cheek bones stood prominently and his nose, hooked above a taut, small mouth. From deep sockets burned eyes black and fiery. He was almost bald, his forehead high and protruding.

Across from him a far wall was banked with large closed circuit television screens monitoring the chateau. Upon one tube Yvonne huddled against the dungeon wall, shoulders sagging, face pressed into her hands. Lights flickered gray when there was movement in any area.

The Siamese slapped his fragile hands. Albert and Marie withdrew reluctantly, but not daring to protest aloud. They were followed by the guards.

The man waved his slender fingers. Solo and Illya followed the direction of his gesture. They saw the dark mouths of guns trained on them from every wall.

They returned their gazes to the smile of the man at the bone-white table.

Illya glanced at Solo, found his fellow agent peering incredulously at the seated man.

For one long moment Solo's hazel eyes struck against the ebony black

ones of the man before him. The room was charged with the static tension generated between them in the silence.

"Dr. Lee Maunchaun," Solo whispered at last.

"Ah, yes. I am the doctor you were anxious to meet."

"But—"

"I'm dead?" Dr. Maunchaun inquired, smiling enigmatically. "A violent death, wasn't it? The last time we met—"

"An atomic misfire," Solo whispered.

"Obviously I survived," Dr. Maunchaun said. "Without nurturing any deeper affection for your people and their goals."

"You always hated on a fantastic scale," Solo said, remembering.

"Perhaps you thought you knew me when I hated. But I had barely learned its nuances at that time, my old enemy." He stared through them at something in the middle distance. "I was born to hatred. I saw my sisters slain because there was not food for female children in my land. I saw starvation.

"I was the youngest of ten surviving children, subsisting on a plot of ground barely thirty square yards. People of my kind learn to live with hatred, or to die of despair. I lived. I persisted. I bought myself—at prices you would never understand—the wisdom of the ages, all the knowledge I would need to buy myself away from the land I hated."

"Only to find yourself meeting people you hated," Solo said it for him.

Dr. Maunchaun gazed at him unblinking. "Ah, yes, we've met before, Mr. Solo. But your partner, we've not met."

"Only in my nightmares," Illya said mildly.

"I'm sure you learned to hate Mr. Kuryakin without needing to know him," Solo said in irony.

Dr. Maunchaun waved his reed-like hand imperiously, dispensing with the preliminaries. He said, abruptly. "Which of you is doing it?"

They gazed at him blankly, as if they did not know he meant the bleep-broadcast signals.

The doctor's voice tautened. "I've been occupied this past hour or I would know unerringly which of you is the culprit. It does not matter. You will suffer equally for this crime."

They remained silent, watching

Dr. Maunchaun gazed at them a moment almost pityingly. Then he pressed a button on the table edge. A scientist in white smock appeared from a side room almost immediately. He carried an oblong sound-detector.

He walked close to where Illya and Solo stood. He passed the oblong before them, its thin antennae trembling.

He reached out, removed the cylinder from Illya's lapel. The expression on his face did not alter. He placed the small object on the table before the doctor.

Maunchaun looked at it but did not touch it. "No doubt made in Japan," he said in contempt.

"It upset your laundry cart," Illya said.

Maunchaun met his gaze for a moment, then shrugged his thin shoulders in his immaculate silk jacket. He pressed another button. "I remind you, there are guns trained on you from the walls."

Illya shrugged.

Maunchaun paused, then as if making a decision, he nodded toward the white-smocked scientist.

The man set the detector down.

From an inside pocket he with drew two small vials. Then he placed goggles and an oxygen mask over his face. He came slowly to Illya and Solo.

He broke the vials with the pres sure of his thumb and extended them toward the faces, of the two young agents.

There was no smoke, nothing they could see, a faint acrid odor, this was all. The scientist retreated. He removed his mask. He glanced toward Dr. Maunchaun and when he nodded, the scientist withdrew from the room.

Illya and Solo could not move, found they could not speak, though

they remained conscious, aware of everything around them.

"No sense gambling with your foolhardy notions of courage," Dr. Maunchaun said.

He pressed another button before him. Almost at once, the corridor opened and Lester Caillou entered. Except that Illya saw this was not the real Caillou. This man, the ringer they'd substituted for the internationally known banker, paused, wincing slightly when he saw Illya.

"It's all right," Maunchaun said to the ringer. "Everything is all right. These are the agents who saved your life, some years ago in the Middle East. I'm sure you won't forget them again."

"No," said the false Caillou.

A knock at the door. Maunchaun pressed a button, the doors parted. A servant entered.

"Lieutenant David of the Paris Police, Doctor," he said.

The police lieutenant entered, paused, momentarily stunned at the opulence of the suite.

Maunchaun nodded almost imperceptibly at the false Caillou, and he spoke as if obeying a signal. "Come in, Lieutenant." His voice was gracious, perfect in its imitation of the real Caillou. "This is my house guest, Dr. Lee Maunchaun, a psychiatrist, and a leading financial expert."

The police officer bowed, awed. Dr. Maunchaun merely inclined his head, without speaking.

The lieutenant, a slender, dark man, nervous and out of his depth, said, "We've been picking up these signals. We traced them here to your chateau, M'sieur Caillou."

The false Caillou nodded graciously and smiled. "It was only a short in our closed-circuit television." He waved his hand with studied negligence toward the bank of screens on the wall.

The police officer stared in awe. "How ingenious."

"Yes," the false Caillou said. "Protection against intrusion. As a matter of fact, these two prowlers—" he inclined his head toward Solo and

Illya—"caused the short in the television sender."

"Prowlers?" The lieutenant straightened. This he understood. "Shall I arrest them, M'sieur Caillou?"

Caillou shook his head. "We have our own secret police to handle these matters, Lieutenant. A matter of security, you understand? We'll deal with them quietly. We have so much panic just now because of these money matters all over the world—we want no notoriety. You understand?"

Dr. Maunchaun insisted upon presenting the lieutenant with a rare Oriental box, filled with gold pieces, and then the police officer was gone. The police cars roared out of the drive.

Maunchaun gazed up at Illya and Solo in chilled triumph. Then he reached out, snapped the small signal cylinder between his fingers.

He pressed a button. When two guards entered, he ordered them to search the prisoners. The agents watched all their identification removed.

The effects of the colorless gas dissipated. Solo gazed at the false Caillou. "So you passed another test, eh? You fooled all Caillou's friends and associates this afternoon?"

Caillou merely straightened, did not reply.

Dr. Maunchaun could not resist boasting. He said, "Ah, no. Our friend here stayed discreetly out of sighs. The real Lester Caillou himself entertained his friends, said what we wished him to say, did what we wished him to do."

He smiled. "After being so pleasantly and temporarily paralyzed as you were, surely you find it easy to believe I can control the mind of a man like your old friend Caillou? Ah, he was present—the precious, perfect host—present in body at least. Only his mind has been kidnapped, Mr. Solo."

Solo stared silently at the parchment face, the sharp-honed features, black eyes, not daring to doubt any boast the doctor made.

Maunchaun smiled faintly. "Perhaps it is vanity, Solo, the need to demonstrate that I, the son of lowest peasants, have accomplished almost everything I set out to do. Or maybe it is because you defeated me once, when we met earlier, thinking even you left me for dead in

an atomic misfire. I want you to see you have no hope of stopping me this time. I shall control international finance—"

"You and THRUSH," Illya said.

The enigmatic smile widened slightly. It was almost as if the doctor said it aloud. He would cross the THRUSH bridge when he reached it.

Maunchaun pressed a button. He sank back then, sitting almost as if he were asleep, his eyes hooded like a cobra's.

Presently the corridor door opened. Marie entered, carrying a machine pistol. The real Lester Caillou walked past her.

Solo stiffened, watching him. It was Lester, all right, except that he moved in the strange manner of a sleepwalker. He was correctly attired, his head tilted in that old way he had, but his eyes were disturbingly empty.

Until this moment, Solo had not seen how completely it was as Dr. Maunchaun said: Only Lester Caillou's mind had been kidnapped.

"Stand there, Lester," Maunchaun said. He inclined his narrow head toward where the fake Caillou stood, identically dressed as the banker was.

Caillou smiled faintly, nodded. He walked to where the ringer stood, paused beside him, watching Maunchaun with a dog-like obedience in his face.

Solo shivered.

"Some of your detractors feel you have made a gross error in forcing gold payments from free world nations, Lester," Dr. Maunchaun said in that level tone which seemed attuned especially for Caillou's hearing.

Caillou gave them a faint superior smile and engaged in an obscure soliloquy on the reasons why only gold could be accepted at the present, despite growing panic in the free world countries. It was his first duty to protect the interests of the international trade organizations against the spiraling inflation, the worth of paper currency— Solo didn't even bother to listen.

He was certain that leading financial experts had little argument that was persuasive against Caillou. Maunchaun was not only a brilliant

psychiatrist, he was the outstanding financial expert of the far east.

He knew how to make even outrageous falsity sound logical.

He was speaking now through Caillou's brainwashed mind.

Solo said with a certainty he did not feel, "The least whisper of what you have done to this man—"

"Yes. The least whisper," Maunchaun agreed. "But who is to broadcast that whisper? You, Mr. Solo? Your accomplice in international capitalist crimes Kuryakin there? Perhaps our old friend Lester Caillou?"

Solo flinched, did not attempt to answer.

Maunchaun indulged a small smile. "Caillou will continue to speak and perform in rote, what ever I tell him to do, as long as I will it. This is deeper than hypnosis, Solo. Deeper than any waking-sleep you can understand. A drug-induced hypnosis. There are secrets of my poor land, Solo, older than your crude civilization—"

Maunchaun stopped speaking, as if bored with the mentalities of his auditors. He clapped his thin hands and the real Lester Caillou was led away.

Maunchaun watched his odd, somnambulistic gait until the door closed. Then he brought his chilled smile back to Solo and Illya.

"And now what shall we do about you gentlemen?"

"I don't know," Solo said. "But I suggest you do it quickly."

Maunchaun waved his hand. "Don't make threats, Solo. Do you mean that if United Network Command doesn't hear regularly from you and Kuryakin, other agents will doom us?"

Solo shrugged. "That's part of

"I assure you I've handled this contingency. Your reports are regularly going into your headquarters in New York—glowing lies about your progress, which I can assure you our old friend Alexander Waverly receives with relish."

Maunchaun pressed another button. Albert and three armed guards entered. "Since we cannot afford to kill them at the moment, I believe an hour in the sound chamber will teach them the error of attempting

to cross me with such childish toys as bleep-signals."

Solo and Illya were marched along the corridor, past rooms converted into chemistry labs. They were shoved into a metal lined chamber twenty feet long, but less than nine feet wide.

The metal was cool to the touch. The room was bare of any furnishings. They found that the metal was perforated from floor through ceiling. Faint sound began to flare through the tiny perforations, already higher than a whistle, and steadily increasing in intensity and rising in decibels.

Solo sagged first. The sounds penetrating his ears were like lances. But when he toppled against the wall, the sound on this side increased unbearably.

It was no better in the center of the area. As they moved from the wall, sound intensity increased, stalking them.

It was like some brain-smashing force, relentless, without pity.

Suddenly the sounds ceased, but the silence was unbearable. Solo felt as if his head were expanding, as though his brain would burst.

Illya sank to his knees, but then the sounds started again. They came upward through the perforated flooring. At first they were welcome, now that their force seemed to press inward upon their brains.

The intensity increased, going beyond the range they could endure. It was like physical blows slapping them about. They ran from one end of the room to the other, unable to escape the unwavering intensity of the sound waves.

They pressed their arms like shields against their heads, but the sounds would have penetrated steel.

Then silence again. They screamed against the pressures and expanding agonies of the silence. They almost welcomed the increase of the sound waves.

Neither was conscious at the end of the hour.

THREE

ILLYA REGAINED consciousness first. He pressed his palms against the throb in his temples. It was a headache beyond description—no hangover could ever approach it. But when his hands touched the sides of his head, he screamed. His head was too sore to touch.

Yvonne was kneeling over him, her face constricted with pity.

"Oh, you poor dears," she whispered. "What have they done to you?"

She extended her hand toward his face. Illya rolled away from it, crying out in panic. "Just don't touch me."

Movement jarred him until he wavered a moment on the brink of unconsciousness. But he did not pass out again. That would have been too easy.

After a long time, Solo stirred. He sat up, his head bent forward loosely on his neck. As Illya had been, Napoleon was unable to touch his temples or his cheeks. He throbbed with pain from his neck up.

He lay still a long time.

"Drug-induced hypnosis," he whispered. "Brainwash. So that's how he controls Caillou."

Illya stared at the distant gray ceiling of the dungeon. "And there's nothing we can do to help him—or the people who are going to be ruined in this game of money manipulation."

Solo did not speak for a long time. Illya thought maybe he had fainted, but it was too terrible an effort to turn his head to see. When he moved even the slightest, he felt as if his brain rattled inside his agonized skull.

The dungeon door squealed open. Biting his mouth, Illya managed to keep from screaming against the rusty sounds.

Marie entered, accompanied by Albert and an armed guard. They came into Illya's line of vision, or he would not have seen them. They wavered before him in some kind of red haze.

"You. Yvonne," Marie said. "Let's go."

Yvonne cried out, protesting. She caught Illya's hand, pleadingly.

Illya winced in agony. "I'm sorry we got you in this, Yvonne," he whispered.

She pressed his hand.

"It's not your fault," she said. "You are very brave, very good. Both of you. You have done all you could."

"Not quite," Illya whispered grimly between his teeth.

He lay there helplessly and watched them lead Yvonne away. For a long time strange sounds drifted into the dungeon through the high window, even through the walls. He tried to think his way out, but thinking was as painful as a physical touch inside his mind, and finally he sank into a troubled sleep.

Illya awakened in the deepest darkness, feeling as if he were being battered by an earth tremor. For some moments he did not know where he was. Then he felt the rough texture of the dungeon floor, the late night chill, the touch of Solo's hand on his shoulder, shaking him.

"What's the matter?" Illya said. His head hurt less intensely now, though he was painfully aware of movement.

"I've figured it out," Solo said.

"You figured what out?"

"The one weakness in Maunchaun's scheme."

"You mean there is one?" Illya's tone doubted it.

"There is one. Drug-induced hypnosis. That's why they had to find Caillou's precise double—that's why they had to bring in a ringer. That's why everything has to go on exact schedule."

"Maybe it's just my headache, but you've lost me somewhere."

"No. Don't you see? There are no ill after-effects of ordinary hypnosis. It can even be benefiting. But drug-induced. That's the key. Lester Caillou had to be prepared for this drug-induced hypnosis. He had to be destroyed."

"You mean this drug is killing him?" Illya sat up, headache forgotten.

"That's right. They can induce hypnosis, or anything else they want with it, but enough of it is fatal. Nobody knows that better than Maunchaun. They can control Caillou just so long—so many weeks, or days, or hours. I don't know that. But you can bet Maunchaun has it figured to the minute. Everything has got to go right for him until the

moment that Caillou falls dead from the effects of that poppy-seed drug—or Maunchaun is lost."

"Looks like he's got nothing to worry about," Illya said emptily.

"He would have," Solo said. "If I could just get out of here. If could do nothing else, I could upset his schedule. I might even save Lester's life —"

"Or lose your own."

"We're expendable, Illya," Solo said. "I don't have to tell you that."

Illya tried to grin. "No. You don't. And I sort of wish you wouldn't keep reminding me."

"Death's been playing with me. It just missed me a few days ago in an Istanbul street. Maybe this time it won't miss. I hate to sit here waiting for it."

Illya sighed heavily. He crawled along the wall, and after a few moments returned with a small packet.

"Maybe I can help you," he whispered.

"What have you got?"

"Friction-bomb blasting pellets. THRUSH made. I took them off that pilot when we had to help him from the midget copter."

Solo laughed admiringly. "That's what they were looking for when they searched us up in Maunchaun's room?"

"I think so." Illya nodded. "I knew the TV cameras were on us when they threw us in here, so when I found that crevice in the wall, I sat there and hid my find."

Solo grinned warmly. "I don't know what I'd do without you."

Illya smiled. "I do. You'd sit here and nurse that king-sized headache."

Solo exhaled. "Let's go."

Illya nodded. "Which way?"

"Will one of those pellets take out that door?"

"Probably. But there are guns out there. If we timed it right, we could go out the window with a better chance."

"I'm with you."

Illya swung up on Solo's shoulders. They walked toward the high window. Illya drew back his arm and threw a friction bomb pellet at the window base.

He sprang from Solo's shoulders then and both retreated swiftly to the wall farthest from the window.

Everything happened with instant suddenness. The bomb exploded outward, carrying the bars of the window with it. While the explosive sound still reverberated inside their heads, they raced across the room.

They moved then with the grace and precision of circus acrobats. Illya flung himself against the wall beneath the window on his knee. Making stirrups of his hands, he waited until the toe of Solo shoe touched his palms. Then he sprang upward, levering Solo into the opening.

Shouts and footsteps rang in the corridors outside the dungeon. The chateau intercom crackled, and then Dr. Maunchaun's voice rattled through it.

Neither Solo nor Illya bothered to listen. They knew that they were on camera, but this no longer mattered.

Solo went all the way through the window. Then he turned, hooked his toe over the outer sill and sprawled inward, reaching out his arms as far as they would go.

Inside the dungeon, Illya stood on his toes, stretching his arms upward tautly.

Solo's hands struck hard against his, fingers clasped around his wrists. Then Illya scrambled upward, using his ties against the rough wall while Solo wriggled himself through the window, drawing Illya after him.

The chateau grounds were black in the dark hour before dawn. But as Illya and Solo sprang from the wall shrubbery dozens of flood lights erupted from everywhere, blasting the lawn with light.

They heard the dungeon door thrown open as Illya wriggled free. Men

shouted from the yard, from parapets. Distantly dogs yowled. Somewhere in the darkness a gun fired. A man swore, and the shooting ceased.

Solo and Illya crouched in the concealment of the shrubbery. Solo pointed toward a car in the drive. "Run for it!"

He did not wait to see if Illya heard. Bent low, he sprinted to ward the drive. He took fifteen giant steps and then sprawled face down in the grass at the precise moment guns fired from the parapets.

He glanced over his shoulder, crawling frantically in the grass. Illya was not with him.

Gunfire sounded and bullets splatted into the sod around him. He had to keep moving.

Something flickered, and from the corner of his eye he saw Illya racing toward one of the red midget helicopters roosting on the lawn.

He came up on his knee, ran, fell forward, rolled over, came up to his feet and threw himself in against a Fiat as the rifles barked, snapping at his heels.

He rolled under the car, the gravel biting into him. Armed men ran from the house. He heard Illya yell, saw the men turn, racing toward the copters.

He reached up, opened the door on the side away from the house. He pulled himself up into the car, let the door close quietly.

There was no key in the switch. He was not disappointed or even delayed, because he had not expected one.

Using a strip of metal, he reached under the dash, shorted the ignition, pressing the starter. The little car shook itself, coming alive.

Solo already had the car in gear before he pulled himself up under the steering wheel.

He saw men racing from the house. They fired with their small arms, the bullets shattering windows, embedding in the metal. The car lurched forward into the drive. He stepped down hard on the gas.

Other and larger cars were already in pursuit before he reached the opened gate and turned out on the highway, headed toward Paris.

He could hear the gunfire back there. But he felt empty, knowing they were no longer shooting at him. They were shooting at Illya. And he knew something else. Illya had run toward those parked copters in order to give him a chance of escape.

He glanced in the rear-view mirror. Other cars came racing out of the driveway. They skidded almost off the shoulders, righting them selves.

With a sense of frustration, Solo pressed the accelerator to the floor. Ahead he saw the faint lights of Paris.

He came around a wide curve, banking. Car horns blared and he skidded past a truck. His pursuers had to slow, and one of them went careening off the roadway.

Solo gripped the wheel, silently begging five more miles of speed from the Fiat.

Checking his rear-view mirror, he found the cars on his trail again.

He saw side roads whirled past on the wind in transit, knowing that he could lose the larger cars only by hitting these side roads.

It was too risky. He saw a truck pulling out of a cross-road ahead.

Timing it exactly, holding his breath, he whipped the little car to the left, directly in front of the horrified driver.

He pressed down on the gas going in front of the truck with only inches to spare.

As he'd hoped, the truck driver panicked, stalled the truck. When he looked back, a crowd was gathering in the avenue, but his pursuers were unable to get past.

By the time the truck was moved, he had gained a precious mile on the men back there. As he neared the market places of Paris, the traffic increased.

But they were back there. He whipped around a corner, climbed a steep, cobbled hill, plunged downward, horns yapping at him.

When he checked his mirror, the larger cars were still trailing him.

He jerked the car around a corner, slammed on the brakes. He was already out of it as it rolled to stop in a no-parking zone.

He ran across the walk, plunged into a kiosk, going downward, racing toward a slowing Metro on the underground tracks.

FOUR

ILLYA SAW he was not going to make it to the midget choppers.

Men with attack hounds came running from beyond the small helicopters in the early morning. Their shadows lunged in the flood lights, ravenous upon the grass.

Marksmen fired from the chateau parapets.

Illya hit the ground, rolling toward the sorry protection of a lilac bush. He lay a moment, panting like a fox. Sounds battered inside his skull. He heard the yowling of the dogs, the raging of men, the gunfire, the sound of cars coughing to life, racing on the drive.

He grinned faintly, knowing that Solo had made it that far at least.

He saw the dogs running toward him. They were still beyond the copters. Other men came from the driveway, and more from the veranda at the front of the chateau.

He made up his mind. The nearest protection was the window in the dungeon. He had accomplished most of his objective. He had caused enough diversion to enable Solo to get into a car and off the grounds.

He came lithely up to his knees. He faked toward the 'copters. When the gunmen wheeled their guns that way, he reversed himself; crouching low, he raced back to the shrubbery at the dungeon window.

He drew a long breath and at the last possible moment dove the remaining few feet into the shrubbery. He stuck his head into the blasted window space and almost bumped heads with a startled guard on a ladder inside the dungeon.

In an instinctive reflex action, Illya thrust out his hand in a stiff-arm motion, catching the man under the chin. He shoved as hard as he could.

He was already scrambling back into the shrubbery, scrambling through it along the wall.

The dogs were nearer; the shouting of the men sounded as if they were in the hedge growth with him. He freed a friction-bomb pellet, set himself and threw it with all his strength at the window. More stones shattered and sprayed in fragments.

For the space of three breaths, everything ceased on the yard.

Illya did not wait to enjoy his small victory. He crawled as fast as he could on all fours along the inside of the shrubbery.

Ahead were gunmen on a small veranda. Setting himself, Illya tossed a small pellet. The explosion rocked the yard, knocked the sentries off their feet.

Illya was over the low wall almost before the debris settled.

He scooped up a gun from the fallen sentry nearest him. The tattoo of gunfire from the yard and from positions above him, sent him scrambling through a smashed window.

With a savage laugh, he looked about, almost as if surprised to find himself back in the house.

The intercom crackled. "Kuryakin! He's in the east wing sun room! Converge there at once!" Maunchaun's voice lashed at Illya in triumph.

Illya jerked the gun up. He shot the eye of the watching camera and then put a round into the intercom. It was almost—but not quite—as satisfactory as blasting the doctor himself.

He heard steps racing toward him along the corridors. He ran across the room, stepped through the draperies.

He shoved open one half of the casement window, let himself through.

The room was loud with people. Illya pressed through the window, but a burst of gunfire from the yard drove him back. From within the room, guns crackled. Glass smashed around him and the draperies shivered under the impact of bullets.

Illya sprang out to the soft ground outside the window. He lost his balance for a moment and lost time setting himself. They continued firing down at him, keeping him in close to the projecting stones of the walls.

As he turned, he saw Albert leaning out of the window, rifle upraised

like a club. For one second, Illya stared up at him. He thought in agony, "Oh, no, not my head!"

As Albert brought the gun-butt down, Illya fired upward. The bullet slashed across Albert's cheek, driving him back a little.

Illya dropped his gun, caught at the rifle in Albert's hands. Putting his feet against the stone foundation, he lunged backward, drawing Albert through the window upon him.

This effectively stopped the gun fire.

Illya wrenched the gun from Albert's hands. He tossed it over his head. Albert's fist sank into Illya's stomach, the breath driven from him.

For a moment, Illya simply hung on while earth, sky, chateau and lawn switched places. He felt the battering of Albert's fists. He gripped Albert's belt in both hands and levered him upward. Then he shoved forward, driving Albert against the huge stones of the chateau.

Albert cried out, going limp. When Illya released him, the big Moor slid limply down the stones, crumpling to the ground.

Illya looked about wildly for one of the guns, but when his head came up, he saw Marie a few feet from him. She stood in the window, something—a dart gun—in her mouth! He shook his head at her, tried to fall away.

But then something stung him in the neck, with the savagery of a wasp, but he knew it was not a wasp. Instinctively, his hand clapped at his neck. But it never rose that high. He felt as if his legs melted off at the knees below him. He was conscious of being nauseated, sick at his stomach, and then he was diving from an incredible distance down toward where Albert lay crumpled on the ground beside the house. He did not remember making it.

FIVE

AT ELEVEN that morning, Napoleon Solo, shaven, refreshed, wearing a faultless gray suit, rearmed, entered the Paris banking district.

Helie strolled into the Rothschild Building, went up in one of the elevators to the Caillou Interests suite.

He entered the reception room of the Caillou offices, and stopped, eyes widening, stunned.

Yvonne sat at her desk, as if this day were like any other day at Caillou, International.

He was staggered to see her here. He had last seen her when she was taken away, crying last night from the dungeon. Looking at her, in a smart dress, an immaculate coiffure, you could not believe that last night had happened to her, outside a nightmare.

She looked up at him as if she had never seen him before.

"Yes, sir? May I serve you?" she said to him in French.

Solo approached her desk, studying her. "Yvonne, are you all right?"

"Of course, M'sieur. Why should I not be all right?"

He flinched, seeing that she was all right only in her brain-washed mind. She was moving in a drug-induced state of euphoria.

Her pupils were like pin-points. Her smile was too loose, and her eyes barely focused.

"What did you wish, sir?" she asked again.

"I want to see Monsieur Caillou," Solo said.

"Have you an appointment? What is your name? I'll announce you."

"I'd rather you didn't do that," he said. He caught her hand as she reached toward the intercom switch. "Why don't we just walk in on him, Yvonne?"

"We couldn't do that, sir." Her tone remained bright and warm—and mindless.

She was like a robot.

He lifted her from the chair, hand clasping her wrist.

"You're hurting me, sir," she said in that smiling, empty voice.

He saw there was no sense trying to reason with her. She had no memory of him, none of having been prisoner in the dungeon.

He simply smiled back at her, marched her across the inner office to the door marked *M. Caillou, Private*.

He did not knock. The false Caillou swung around as Solo closed the door behind him and Yvonne.

Caillou leaped toward the phone. But Solo said, "Don't do it, fellow." He showed him the U.N.C.L.E. .38 Special.

Caillou winced, straightened. "What do you want?"

"We'll start with the easy questions," Solo said. "Who are you?"

"Why, he's Monsieur Lester Caillou," Yvonne said, as if a tape had been activated inside her by the question.

He sighed, seeing that Yvonne had been programmed by Dr. Maunchaun to recognize this man as the real Caillou under every condition. He ignored her.

He tilted the gun. "I'm waiting, fellow. I tell you this. If I kill you now, Maunchaun's little plan will fall apart. I can end it at any moment, simply by removing you. You better think about that. No matter what they promised you, you won't collect it with bullets in you."

The false Caillou sank into a chair behind his desk. "My name is Jacques DuMont. I am nobody. I was a race-track gambler from Marseilles. I was forced into this. It is not from choice I do it. You will gain nothing by killing me."

"Unfortunately, you're wrong. Still, I hope I don't have to."

DuMont shivered. His face revealed his sickness. "What do you want of me?"

"Quite a bit, I'm afraid. We'll begin by having you call for your car. You are to tell your chauffeur to meet you at the building entrance. But if you say one word more than this, it will be your last."

He held the gun near DuMont's face while the impostor made the call to the building garage. He replaced the phone, his hand shaking.

"Let's go."

DuMont got his hat.

Solo said, "I warn you. I have filed the firing mechanism of my gun so

that even anything that disturbs me will cause it to fire. Even if I am killed, you also are dead. You'd better concentrate on keeping me alive."

They went through the outer offices. DuMont spoke to no one, looked neither left nor right. Yvonne accompanied them.

They entered one of the elevators, descended to the street. At the door, Solo checked, seeing the Rolls Royce in the loading area. He also saw the men lounging along the building, aware that they were THRUSH gunmen.

"You will cross the walk, get in the car," Solo told DuMont and Yvonne. "Walk naturally. Remember that my gun is fixed on you. You lose, no matter what happens."

DuMont nodded. The chauffeur got out of the car, came around and opened its rear door as Yvonne and the false banker crossed the walk under the canopy.

Solo waited until the chauffeur closed the door and started around the car again. He stepped out of the door, angled across the walk. He moved along the car behind the chauffeur, timing it so that his gun touched his back as he opened the door.

"Get in and drive as I tell you," Solo ordered. He got into the rear of the car. The driver moved the car out into the traffic. He spoke into the communicator.

"Where do you wish to go?"

Solo spoke grimly. "The Chateau Caillou, driver."

DuMont and the chauffeur stared at him as if he were crazy. Solo shrugged. Perhaps they were right.

PART FOUR:

INCIDENT OF THE EIFFEL TOWER

A MILE FROM the Caillou chateau, Napoleon Solo ordered the driver to turn the car off the highway. They pulled into a copse of trees in the hammock below the huge old estate.

Solo secured the driver with ropes, and left him gagged on the rear floor of the Rolls. Walking behind Yvonne and Jacques, he entered the grounds through a wooden door in the stone wall.

They came up behind the servants' quarters, moved past the garage. At the wall of the house, Solo found the lever which opened a sliding door.

They stepped into the stairway, leading down.

They reached the foot of the steps in the basement foyer before the alarms wailed through the ancient castle.

Maunchaun's voice crackled on the inter-com. When Albert and the guards ran out on the level above them, Solo did not even move his gun from Jacques' spine. Maunchaun ordered: "Shoot him. I do not care why he came back here. I shall no longer tolerate his meddling!"

Solo said nothing, but Jacques DuMont screamed in the terror that had been building inside him on the long ride out from the city. "Wait!"

Guns were already raised, sighted on Solo. Yvonne continued to stand near them, robot-like, unmoved by anything that happened around her.

"Wait!" DuMont yelled again. "A hair-trigger. Even if he is shot, I shall be killed. Wait!"

The men with the guns hesitated.

Solo spoke in a conversational tone. "I hope you heard that, Dr. Maunchaun."

There was a pause. The intercom crackled vibrantly.

At last Maunchaun spoke. "If you kill DuMont, I shall be forced to use the real Caillou. It will not be as easy, but it will still succeed."

"You know better, Maunchaun," Solo said. "It's all over. You know that. It has been, since I got out of here this morning. United Network Command has a full report. They are waiting at a medical center now to receive Lester Caillou—the real Caillou."

"And you expect to walk in here and simply walk out with him unharmed?"

"I haven't given you any terms," Solo said. "I came back for Illya Kuryakin and Lester Caillou. When you bring them here, I will tell you what your chances are to get out of this alive."

Maunchaun laughed. After a moment a guard brought Lester down the steps. At the sight of the real Caillou, Yvonne whimpered gently, looking from him to DuMont—puzzled, the terrors starting in her again.

From the dungeon, a guard led Illya.

Solo winced, seeing his partner. Illya's face was battered and bruised from the beatings inflicted upon him since dawn. He dragged his feet when he walked. His wrists were linked in handcuffs chained to a band about his waist.

Maunchaun laughed again. "You do not look very large, or very awesome on my television screen, Mr. Solo."

Solo continued staring at Illya's swollen face. He did not answer. Involuntarily he jabbed the mouth of his gun into DuMont's spine. The impostor screamed.

"Do you think I am going to let you live, Solo?" Maunchaun's Voice persisted. "You, or Caillou—any of you? If as you suggest you have destroyed my plan to use the World Bank as an instrument of world panic, what have I to gain by permitting you to live to testify against me?"

"You've one gamble, Doctor," Solo said. "You know how long Lester Caillou will live on this drug you've been feeding him."

"Indeed I do."

"I'm willing to gamble with you," Solo said. "I'll exchange DuMont for the real Lester. Caillou, if you let us out of here."

"Why should I?"

"There is a chance Caillou won't live to get to the medical center. There is a chance he won't recover sufficiently to testify against you. That's your only chance."

"And all I have to do is to allow you four people safe conduct from this house?"

"I've bad news for you, Doctor. If we are not out of here in—" Solo checked his watch, "—in thirty more minutes, operatives from United Network Command and the French police will move in here. We're giving you thirty minutes, because if this matter can be settled without further notoriety further panic can be avoided. I thought you'd be interested in thirty minutes. A man like you should be able to do many things in thirty minutes."

There was that pause, vibrant in the silence. Finally, Maunchaun said, almost pleasantly, "Let them go. All guards, let them go."

Holding Lester Caillou's arm, Solo retreated. Yvonne moved beside Illya. They went up the steps, through the door in the wall to the yard.

Solo was not deceived that Maunchaun had surrendered so docilely.

The safest plan for Maunchaun would be to permit them to leave, to clear out of the chateau in his midget copters before the world fell in on him.

By now Solo knew that Maunchaun was not interested in safety. His imagination moved through vast spaces, and peril was part of his existence.

He said, "The 'copters. Walk at an angle as if we were going past them toward the gate. At my signal, run to the nearest one."

They walked across the lawn in the sun. Nothing stirred inside the chateau or out of it. Not even a bird whistled in the trees. There was no breeze. It was as if everything held its breath, waiting for Dr. Maunchaun's next move.

Solo felt as if he were wearing a large target in the middle of his back. Maunchaun was not going to let them get Caillou to the waiting physicians—not going to let them live, even though his gigantic fiscal plot had been destroyed.

"Now!" Solo said.

They ran toward the nearest chopper. Caillou staggered.

Fearful, Solo glanced at him. He slipped his arm around him, supporting him. Ahead of them, Yvonne and Illya scrambled into the copter.

Solo half lifted Caillou. He crawled into the bucket seat at the

controls. Illya managed to reach his manacled arms out and close the plastic door.

Solo started the engine, revving the motor. Men ran from the house, through the doors, the grounds filling with them. They carried guns.

Solo engaged the controls; the blades whirled. The small whirly bird swung upward like a frantic swan.

Solo tossed Illya the handcuff keys he'd taken from Marie in that side-street hotel. Illya unlocked the cuffs, let them dangle at his waist. He checked the 'copter, found a machine pistol, a box of friction-bomb pellets.

Caillou sagged silently against a bulkhead.

Yvonne shivered, staring at Caillou. Shock and fear were at battle with the effects of the drugs inside her.

Solo stared downward. The men on the lawn outside the chateau looked like ants. They stood unmoving on the grass staring upward.

No one made any move to pursue them.

"This was too easy," Solo said aloud.

The speaker on the helicopter radio crackled. "I wondered when this would occur to you, Mr. Solo," Maunchaun's voice taunted.

"I thought maybe you were truly intelligent, Doctor," Solo answered.

"I am intelligent, Solo. It is you who is naïve. Do you think I can let any of you live?"

"I think you can now. It's over."

"Oh, no, Mr. Solo. With you and the real Caillou aboard the chopper, it has really just begun. After all, Mr. Solo, world domination is at stake here. Could I afford to be outwitted by Napoleon Solo?"

"You're wasting your last thirty minutes, Doctor," Solo reminded him.

"Don't worry about my thirty minutes, Mr. Solo. Worry about yours. Look around you. Secure? Or do you finally see that I have the four of you exactly where I want you?"

"I feel pretty good."

"Mr. Solo, think about it. If you were to die now—the four of you—could I not have Jacques DuMont assume Caillou's identity? Could he not agree with all the articles in your report to your agency? Could we not all regret the death of the two agents of U.N.C.L.E. and the *false* Caillou?"

"After all, Solo, my plan is deep into fruition—many international bankers agree with my theories—as advance through the brainwashed Monsieur Caillou. Do you begin to understand?"

Suddenly the midget helicopter vibrated from bow to stern. Yvonne screamed. Only Caillou, sprawled on the small floor space, did not react.

Solo fought the controls. Nothing happened.

The copter veered abruptly, flying upward at a furious burst of speed.

It continued in a roll, going all the way over.

Solo worked the foot levers, the hand controls. The small plane trembled, finally righting itself, but not through anything Solo was able to do.

"Do you begin to understand?" Maunchaun's voice taunted. "You are on radio control now, Solo. That is another wonderful feature of our midget birds. They can be flown without pilots. I am this moment directing your flight... As you have been every moment in these past days, you are completely at my mercy."

Solo did not answer. He looked around the small cockpit.

Maunchaun's voice taunted, "Looking for parachutes, Mr. Solo?"

Illya lifted the two packs silently.

"Only two of them?" Maunchaun's voice was filled with mock concern. "Will only two of you be able to leap from the copter, Solo? Who will be saved? Caillou? Will he live long enough to get to earth? And if he does, long enough to get to medical aid? The secretary? You? Kuryakin?"

The midget helicopter held a steady course, now that Dr. Maunchaun had demonstrated his complete mastery of it.

Ahead, Solo saw the buildings of Paris, near and yet impossibly

removed, as if on another planet.

He abandoned any attempt to control the chopper.

The radio speaker crackled. "Do you see the Eiffel Tower ahead, Solo?" Maunchaun's taunting voice inquired.

"I see

"I have electronically set your helicopter on a collision course with the upper stories of the tower, Solo. The course is locked. It cannot be altered. I need no longer concern myself with you or your fate. The copter will be smashed—friction-bomb pellets are aboard, will demolish further the ship and you people. You will be destroyed beyond any hope of identification by any chemical or other scientific means. Good bye, Mr. Solo. You waged a persistent battle."

Yvonne was pressed against Illya's shoulder. Her body shook.

Solo said. "Yvonne."

She turned, seeing he held one of the chute packs ready to harness it upon her.

"Oh, no," she whispered. "It does not matter about me. I am nobody."

"I got you in this," Solo said. "I'm getting you out of it. Now. Hurry! We've got no time to argue about it."

Her head tilted. She stared beyond his shoulder at the Eiffel Tower taking black shape directly ahead in the distance, seeming to hurtle toward them on its collision course.

She looked at Illya's battered face, at Lester slumped beside her, at Solo. Finally, her eyes brimming with tears, she nodded.

Solo harnessed the chute on Yvonne. He pushed open the door of the copter. She hung a moment on the brink. Then she hurtled outward, plunging downward.

Solo and Illya stared after her a moment as she careened over and over in space. Suddenly the lines of her chute streamed outward on the wind, the striped nylon whipped in the wind. Her skirts and the chute filled with air, and she went floating, sails and skirts like bright balloons in the sunlight.

The radio speaker crackled. "Solo? Are you still there, or have you

abandoned the ship like a good little rat?"

"I'm here," Solo said.

"Why don't you jump? What's left, Solo? One chute? For three? You have little time left to choose the one worthy to live." Maunchaun's voice dripped sarcasm. "It will be a fearful, fiery death. You might live for some moments after the copter strikes the girders of the tower. I don't envy you your death, Solo."

Solo said nothing.

He slipped his arms through the shoulder straps of the chute. He nodded at Illya, who worked swiftly with him, tightening until he was securely harnessed in it.

"Minutes left to you now, Solo." Maunchaun taunted.

Solo didn't even bother listening any more. He reached out, took the handcuffs chain-linked to the metal band at Illya's waist. He clicked one handcuff about Lester Caillou, the other to his own wrist. He secured his hand to the release clip of the chute, thrust open the copter door.

"Hang on," he said.

Caillou and Illya clasped their arms about him. For one moment Solo stared at the huge black tower erupting through the trees toward them.

Below, the town stirred, aware of the small machine bearing toward the tower.

Solo thrust outward, leaping into the air, jerking on the ripcord at that instant.

As they leaped, Illya threw the handful of friction-bomb pellets with all his strength against the instrument panel.

For one moment longer the small plane held its unwavering course directly toward the upper reaches of the Eiffel Tower. Then it erupted in mid-air, fragmenting in blooms and plumes of fire. The parts of the plane flew wildly, like bright pinwheels.

The chute opened, jerking hard against the weight of the three men. It puffed tense and filled with air, staggered aimlessly across the

atmosphere, dancing, bobbling, and finally righting itself, plummeting downward.

Solo heard Illya's relieved laughter. Then he heard Caillou laugh, too, and his heart leaped because he knew for the first time that Caillou would make it—to the waiting doctors and to full recovery.

They had won.

Solo heard more wild laughter, and realized, almost with a sense of shock, that the laughing was his own. It poured out of him.

They rocked earthward, laughing in triumph and the sheer wonder of being alive.

On the concourse below, an incredible crowd was gathering form, coming from everywhere, converging beneath them. Staring down, they saw that most of them were tourists, with cameras clicking.